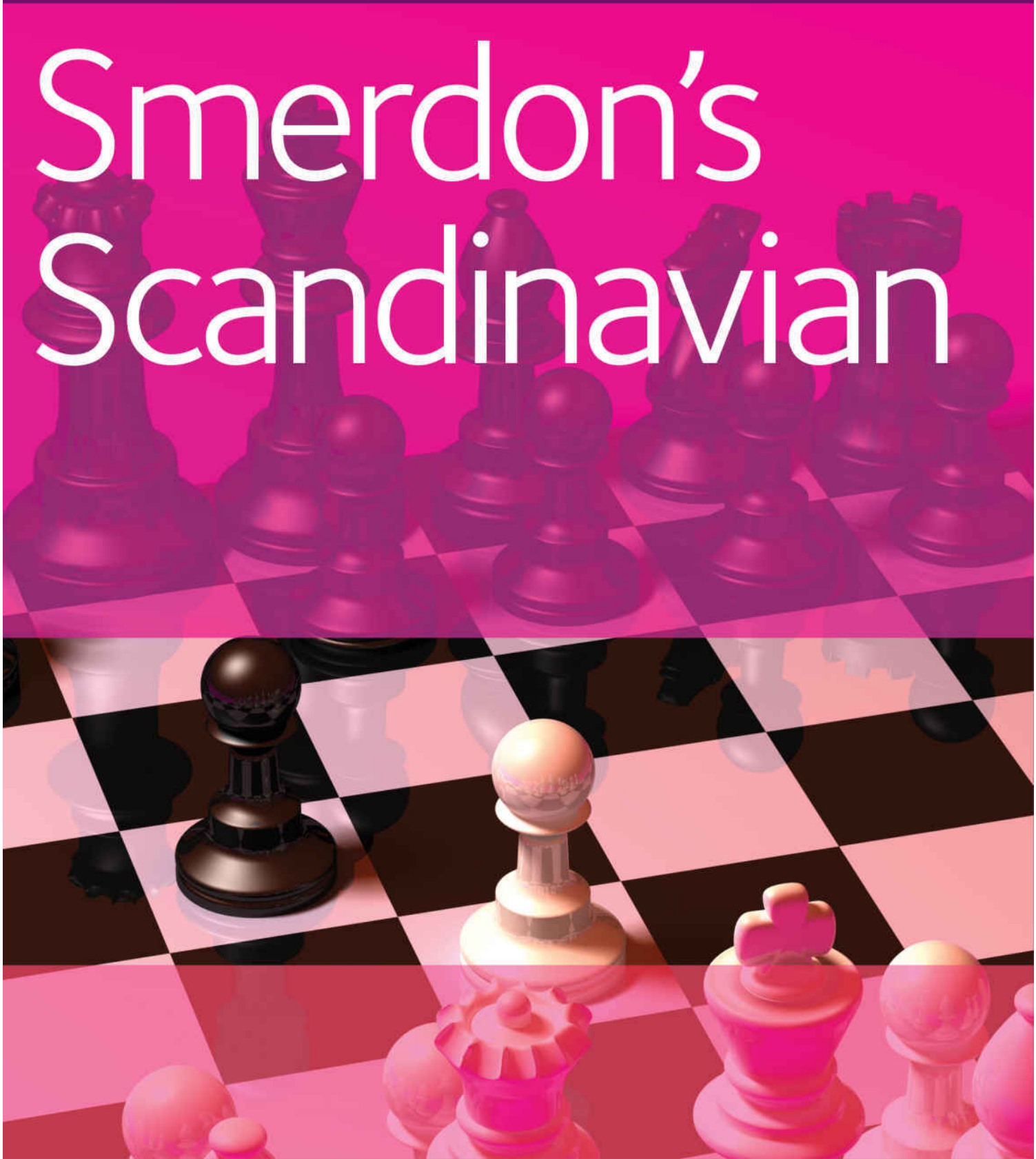


David Smerdon

Smerdon's Scandinavian



EVERYMAN CHESS

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David Smerdon is a Grandmaster from Australia. He has represented his country at six chess Olympiads, and played board one for the Australian team at the 2012 and 2014 Olympiads. In 2009, he won the Oceania Zonal Championship and qualified for the World Cup. He's a regular contributor to the popular chess openings websites ChessPublishing.com and Chess.com, as well as writing several opening articles for New in Chess Yearbooks.

Dedication

*To my parents, who taught me to play well, and
to Manuel, who taught me to play whatever I wanted.*

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Acknowledgements

This book has been quite a mammoth undertaking, largely because I underestimated the significance of a lack of good source material. Quite a lot of the theory has had to be developed from scratch; the positive side of this is that you are in possession of a mass of high-calibre analysis of which your opponents are very unlikely to be aware. Nevertheless, despite having only my name on the cover, there are many people I must acknowledge, without whose help this book would probably not be in front of you.

Special thanks to Guy West, a lifetime gambiteer, for his very useful analysis and insights on many lines; you'll see his name appear several times throughout the book. Thanks also to others for analytical comments, including Stefan Bücker, Ian Rogers, Vasil Vasilev (and others from the ChessPublishing forum), Manuel Weeks, and the whole team from Club Bullwinkle. Thanks to my editor John Emms for allowing me to skirt several deadlines, and for allowing me to include his loss as an illustrative game! Thanks to Paul Chalupa for inspiring in me a love of gambits, and a big thanks to my good friends Andrew Fitzpatrick and Tristan Stevens for both their genial encouragement and for agreeing to be my chess experiment 'guinea pigs'. Finally, I cannot thank Sabina enough for her unwavering support and indispensable motivation. My appreciation for you is unbounded.

Preface

Way back in 2000, my high school chess team unexpectedly qualified for the final of the World Schools Chess Championships. This was quite an astonishing achievement for an unassuming school from Brisbane, Australia, and even more so given that our team's board two to six had an average rating of around 1800. As the only experienced player, it was my job to come up with a complete opening repertoire for both colours to teach my teammates before the final. The criteria were that it had to be narrow enough that it was guaranteed to get my teammates into 'our' book from the first move, easy to learn quickly, and also tricky enough that there were decent chances our much higher-rated opponents might fall into a fatal opening trap.

This was a tough ask for only a month's preparation, but at least against 1 e4, I thought to myself, there seemed a worthy candidate. I decided on an offbeat sideline in the Scandinavian that I knew as the 'Portuguese', starting with 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4!?. As time was of the essence, I completed the repertoire against 1 e4 with the Icelandic Gambit (3 c4 e6), as well as the unnamed 3 Nf3 Bg4. Before I could teach these variations to my teammates, though, I had to learn them myself, and so I began an intense study of these obscure gambits.

Unfortunately, our crusade in the final was unsuccessful. (Incidentally, the Norwegian school that defeated us had just acquired a new student who, at the time, was too weak to make the team: a certain Magnus Carlsen.) On the positive side, the preparation had inspired me that there was more to these so-called dubious gambits than met the eye. I was particularly attracted to Black's straightforward, almost barbaric strategy: sacrificing material from move one in exchange for quick piece activity and an unshakeable pursuit of the initiative.

After finishing high school, I started playing 1 ... d5 in tournament games, and in 2002 I used it as my main weapon against 1 e4 in the

World Junior (U20) Championships, with reasonable success. As my knowledge of the lines grew, I discovered that there were dozens of dangerous traps within the gambits, even though I had to develop most of the theory on my own. It amazed me that I couldn't find any chess books or articles about this exciting system; after all, who wouldn't want to play an opening that gives Black the chance to checkmate White in under twenty moves?

Fifteen years later, surprisingly little has changed with regard to the chess literature on these gambits. My own experience with them, however, has grown tremendously. I have played almost seventy classical games and over three hundred blitz games with the opening system, with a score of over 70%. But to be honest, I haven't kept playing this way because of the score; rather, I just enjoy the style and the philosophy that complements these gambits. To play such a repertoire is to declare that we play chess for fun, for the joy of the fight, and for the beauty of wild tactics and romantic attacks. If it earns us points along the way, so much the better.

During this time I have also come to understand that there are many other players who share both this philosophy and the love of these gambits. After many requests, and noting that a serious book on this opening system still didn't exist, I decided that it was time for the theory I have developed over the years to finally reach a public audience. I thought that this might coincide with me slowly retiring the opening from my repertoire in tournament play, but in fact, this project turned out to be much more than just a reworking of old analyses. During the course of writing this book, I have discovered so many new ideas and improvements for both sides that this book has rejuvenated my enthusiasm for the gambits, as I hope it does for you!

Introduction

This Opening is Unsound

Make no mistake about it: from any fundamental mainstream chess perspective, the repertoire I am offering in this book should be, *has* to be, unsound. After all, I am proposing to sacrifice a pawn with the black pieces on the very first move. If you're after a correct, classical repertoire with Black against 1 e4, then you'd best look elsewhere.

On the other hand, if you are the sort who likes to attack no matter what the risks, if you enjoy coffeehouse gambits and highly unorthodox tactical skirmishes, if you revel in adventure in each game or want to unsettle your opponent and get the fight onto your home turf from move one, then this just might be the book for you.

After 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6, we plan to certify the sacrifice on the very next move, whether it be after 3 d4 Bg4, 3 Nf3 Bg4, 3 c4 e6 or even 3 Bb5+ Nbd7. In exchange for one lousy foot soldier, Black gains a lead in development, fantastic piece activity and immediate, dangerous attacking chances against the white king. These gambits are characterized by brilliant sacrificial assaults and spectacular miniatures that have cast fear into the hearts of players who sit behind the white pieces. Gradually, over the years, the theory has developed whereby a well-prepared opponent can successfully navigate the opening pitfalls, but this system still catches out plenty of adversaries, particularly at club levels.

Moreover, even against the trusted main lines this sacrificial Scandinavian has held up remarkably well, as my years of experience support. This book will not demonstrate the definitive refutation of the 3 ... Bg4 system, but only because I don't know what it is. If you're just browsing this book in order to find one – shame on you! – let me save you some time by directing you to the chapter of Section One entitled 'The Correspondence Refutation', which is a good start. However, as you will see, it is far from simple for White to gain an advantage even in this most testing of variations, while the perils for the first player are very real indeed. The consequences, if

White wants to try to take advantage of Black's audacity, are an early exposure to treacherous traps and insidious incursions, as well as a precarious stumble into a mire of tactical lines with which you will be familiar, but your opponent will most likely not.

I've been playing this system for well over a decade now against well-prepared masters without a convincing repudiation, which, as a practical player, is good enough for me to keep going. Over the years, many refutations have been claimed in various texts and commentaries, and I will address them all in this book. Some of them lead to equality, some of them are based on tricks that are quite easily navigated, and some of them are downright bad. We'll look at all of them, and you will be well armed to face any opponent who naively feels they deserve to 'smash' your insolence on move one. We don't mind this aggression. In fact, we revel in their arrogance – and we'll use it to our advantage. As Black, we know the terrain better than our opponents, we are better equipped to deal with the characteristically unorthodox structures and, most importantly, we get to have far more fun!

This book is, above all, a practical guide. I've written it as a complete repertoire for Black against 1 e4, and as such I haven't ignored any lines just because they are objectively inferior. Instead, I have concentrated on all of the alternatives you are likely to encounter at the board, no matter what their merit. I will regularly tell you how often you can expect to encounter specific variations, and which of our replies pose the most practical difficulties. However, I've also tried to be as honest as possible in my evaluation of the positions, and the lines in this book have all been exhaustively checked by the strongest chess engines in the world.

From the black side, I've chosen the most aggressive, enjoyable and, above all, practical variations to complete the repertoire. Often, you will be given a choice of different options to suit your taste or workload, which means that you don't have to learn everything in this book if you don't want to (if you are especially lazy, see *How to Use This Book* to find out how you can really cut down on the amount of theory you need to learn). For example, I have comprehensively covered both 3 c4 e6 and 3 c4 c6, but both lines are styled with a

view to Black's most attacking options. You will also find that I have proposed strong improvements and new ideas for both sides in many variations; there's no point learning how to deal with the current theory just to be blown off the board with a new move in a year's time. But the majority of the juicy new novelties in this book – and there are loads of them – are for Black. Within these pages lies a treasure trove of new ideas and unplayed improvements just waiting to be released on an unsuspecting victim.

In composing this repertoire, my choice of variations has been guided by three fundamental considerations:

1) Practicality

One of the key advantages of playing this system is that most 1 e4 players have never given these lines any detailed study. The idea that proponents of the black side know the resulting positions better than their opponents is one of the key weapons behind the repertoire, and this practical edge has also guided my choice of variations. The suggested system generally leads to positions where Black has dangerous attacking chances that are very difficult to defend against over the board, or to positions where it is far easier for White to go wrong than Black. Moreover, as I've mentioned, you will often be able to choose between different lines for Black to suit your situation.

2) Theoretical soundness

Playing a practical, unusual system is all well and good, but it counts for nothing if a well-prepared opponent can blow it out of the water. To that end, I have usually steered away from recommending the more dubious subvariations that, while being tricky and dangerous in blitz, are refuted. Our repertoire, to the best of my extensive computer-aided analysis, is theoretically sound in the sense that I have found no clear way for White to get anything beyond a slight (but manageable) advantage, and only after profound accuracy. Moreover, in the very few lines in which I have concluded that White stands marginally better, I have devoted extra attention to the resulting positions in order to guarantee that the diligent reader can be confident of at least securing a draw, while posing White substantial practical problems.

3) Enjoyment

Finally, when all else is equal, I have tried to remain true to the spirit of the system in choosing lines that are rich in complex, unorthodox and fighting potential. Of course, if White is staunchly dedicated to blunting every attacking opportunity we prepare, she can do so – at the cost of giving up any chance of an advantage. However, when given the choice between two options of relatively equal merit, I usually opt against safe, passive equality in favour of double-edged murkiness with counter-attacking chances for both sides.

Before we get into the best way to make use of this book, let's break up the chatter with some real chess to give you a feel for why I and so many other devotees are addicted to this opening system. I have chosen three inspirational games to get you started on your journey. The first two were of great historical importance to the development of the repertoire, while the final game gives a sense of the modern interpretation.

Inspirational Game #1

For many people, this opening is known as ‘the Portuguese’, a misnomer that is a little unfair to earlier exponents of the gambit, in particular the Belgium IM Michel Jadoul. Nevertheless, the legend behind the misnaming is quite captivating. In 1996, Portugal and China met for a round-robin match in Macao. On the Portuguese side of things was the creative IM Rui Damaso, who was drawn to play with Black against two of China’s strong grandmasters. The following game was played in round three, in which Damaso unleashed the outrageous 3 ... Bg4!? and earned a brilliant tactical victory against his fancied opponent. The story goes that the Chinese team spent the next few days studying this crazy ‘new’ opening, eventually concluding that such a cheeky, unprincipled concept should be simply met by taking all of Black’s proffered material. In round seven, GM Zili Wang confidently confronted Damaso’s 3 ... Bg4 with 4 f4 Bf5 5 c4 (‘the Banker’) ... and was duly checkmated in only thirteen moves!

With all credit to Jadoul for inventing the opening, the following game is of great historical importance, as the inspirational way in which Black conducts the attack ignited what could be called the modern wave of popularity for 3 ... Bg4.

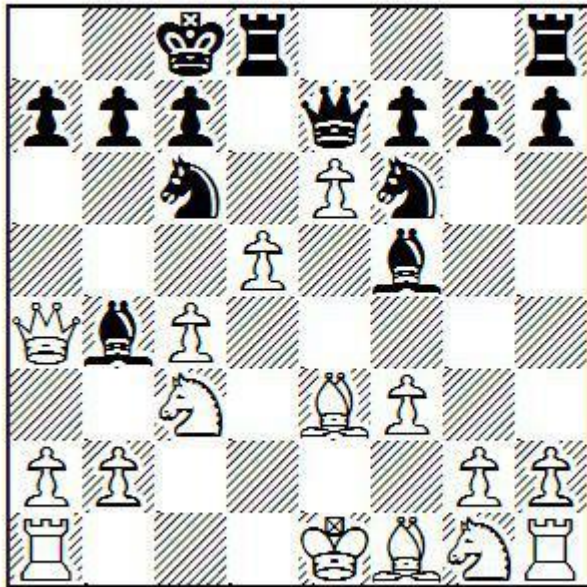
Ye Jiangchuan-R.Damaso

China-Portugal match, Macao 1996

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Be2

The ‘Wuss’, a solid but unambitious variation that you are likely to encounter quite often in practice.

A few days later, the aforementioned infamous miniature continued with the greedy 4 f3 Bf5 5 c4. It would make an interesting trivia question to find out whether a grandmaster has ever been checkmated in fewer moves – and playing with White, no less! The game continued 5 ... e6 6 dxe6 Nc6 7 Be3 Bb4+ (7 ... Qe7 is more accurate, as we shall see) 8 Nc3 Qe7 9 d5 0-0-0 10 Qa4?



W

10 ... Nxd5!! (Boom!) 11 cxd5 Qh4+ 12 Kd1 (12 g3 Bxc3+ wins the queen via a deadly discovered attack; 12 Ke2 Nd4+!! 13 Bxd4 Qxd4 14 Rd1 Qe5+ 15 Ne4 Bxe4 16 Qxb4 Bc2+ wins in a more prosaic fashion) 12 ... Rxd5+!! 13 Nxd5 (sportingly allowing a fitting finale) 13 ... Qe1 mate, Wang Zili-R.Damaso, Macao 1996.

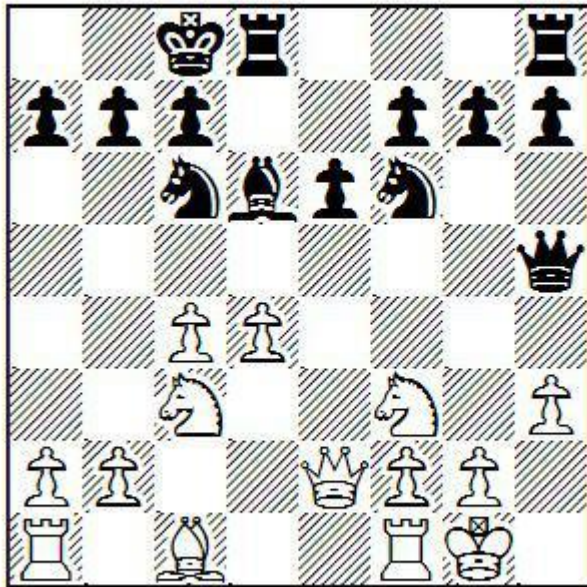
4 ... Bxe2 5 Qxe2 Qxd5 6 Nf3 e6 7 0-0

7 c4! is the only genuine try for an advantage in this variation.

7 ... Bd6 8 c4 Qh5!

Threatening ... Bxh2+.

9 Nc3 Nc6 10 h3 0-0-0!



Opposite-sided castling is a feature of the Wuss variation and also the best way for Black to liven up proceedings. The game now turns into an attacking race, and Black already has running shoes on.

11 Be3 g5!?

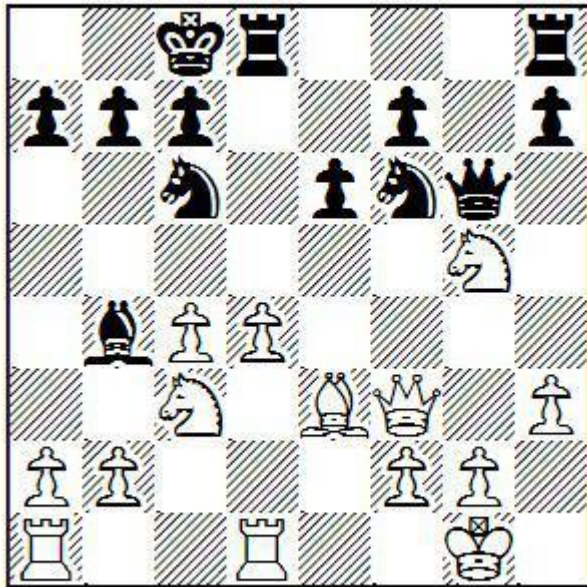
Points for attitude, though objectively Black should have first prepared this by ... Rhg8, with excellent chances. I can only imagine White's reaction to this second outrageous pawn sacrifice in the first eleven moves of the game.

12 Nxcg5 Qg6 13 Qf3?!

13 Nf3! Rhg8 14 Nh4 Qg7 gives Black a dangerous initiative on the kingside, but White should have chanced this defensive approach.

13 ... Bb4! 14 Rfd1?

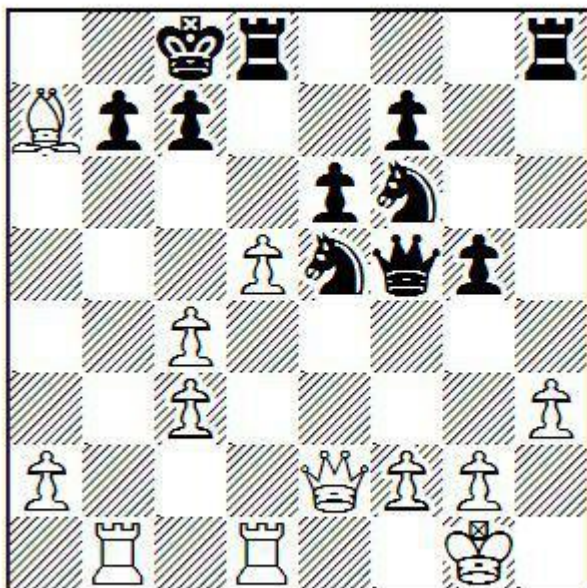
Black's courage is rewarded. Better was 14 Nce4! Be7! with excellent compensation for Black.



14 ... Bxc3 15 bxc3 h6!

Suddenly, White's knight is short of squares.

16 d5 Ne5 17 Qe2 hxg5 18 Bxa7 Qf5 19 Rab1



19 ... Ne4

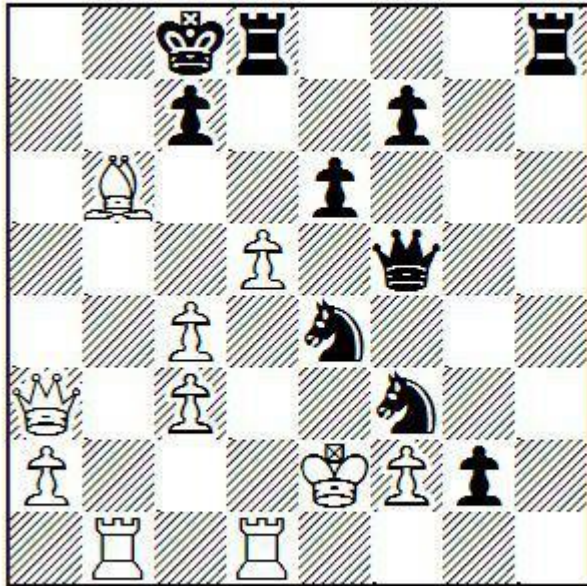
Already winning on material, Damaso could have crowned his historic outing for 3 ... Bg4 appropriately with the explosive 19 ...

Rxh3!! 20 gxh3 Rh8! with an unparryable attack.

20 Bd4 g4! 21 Qb2 b6 22 Qa3 gxh3 23 Bxb6 Nf3+ 24 Kf1

Or 24 gxf3 h2+ 25 Kg2 Qh3+ 26 Kh1 Qxf3 mate.

24 ... hxg2+ 25 Ke2



25 ... Ng3+!

These knights have had quite a day out. And one of them will soon produce a rather unexpected reincarnation ...

26 fxg3 Qe4+ 27 Be3 g1N+!!

He's back!

28 Kf1 Qxc4+ 29 Kg2 Rh2 mate

Perhaps now you can appreciate why this game is credited with sparking the 3 ... Bg4 craze!

Inspirational Game #2

This was one of the first classic victories from the dangerous Icelandic (or 'Palme') Gambit, after which both the opening and its talented English proponent earned a deservedly dangerous reputation.

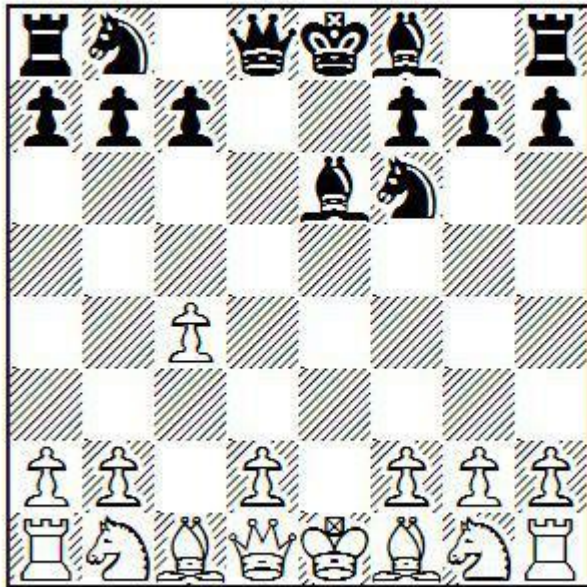
M.Kuijf-J.M.Hodgson

Wijk aan Zee 1989

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6!

The start of the gambit.

4 dxe6 Bxe6



5 d4?!

The most natural move, but not the best. White underestimates the speed at which the black forces will develop.

5 Nf3 is the main line, after which I recommend Black continue 5 ... Qe7! 6 Qe2 Nc6 7 d4 Bf5! with excellent compensation.

5 ... Bb4+ 6 Bd2

6 Nc3 Ne4! is also uncomfortable for White.

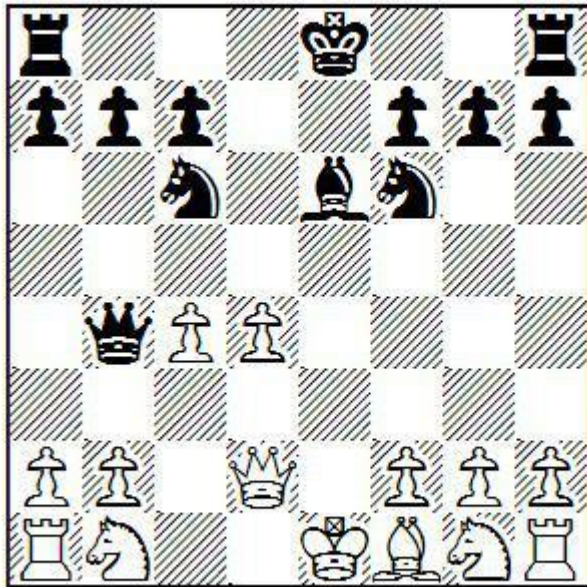
6 ... Qe7 7 Bxb4

White should have preferred returning the pawn with the tamer 7 Be2, although presumably he was still out to punish Black for such impudence in the opening. Then 7 ... Ne4 8 Nf3 Nxd2 9 Nbx d2 Bxc4 is equal.

7 ... Qxb4+ 8 Qd2

8 Nd2?! Nc6! 9 d5 (or 9 Ngf3? 0-0-0 10 d5 Nxd5! and wins) 9 ... 0-0-0! leaves Black with an incredibly strong attack.

8 ... Nc6



9 Nc3?

White's only chance was to walk the tightrope with 9 d5 0-0-0! 10 Nc3!, when Black can unleash the powerful novelty 10 ... Ne5!!, after which White remains in big trouble.

9 ... 0-0-0!?

Here 9 ... Bxc4! was simple and strong, when Black has a clear advantage. However, Hodgson is known for hunting the big game, and simply regathering the pawn wasn't on his radar.

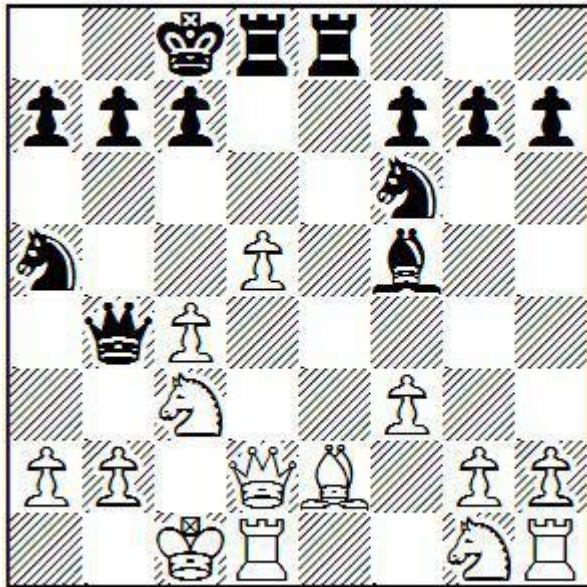
10 d5 Bg4

The bishop finds its way to our favourite square after all, preparing to bring the final rook into the attack along the e-file. While the text is objectively not the best, it certainly presents White with the most opportunities to go wrong. As we saw in the note to White's eighth move, 10 ... Ne5!! is a valuable and unplayed improvement.

11 f3 Rhe8+ 12 Be2 Bf5 13 0-0-0!

The only chance, although White's king remains desperately short of air.

13 ... Na5



The black pieces create a menacing force around the white queenside. Several threats are in the air, including the cute ... Qb3, followed by ... Qxa2 and ... Nb3 mate.

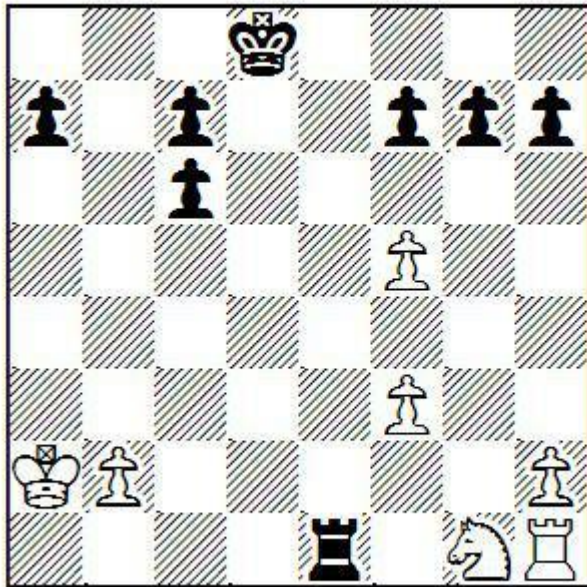
14 g4?!

14 Nb5? loses brilliantly to 14 ... Rxe2!! 15 Nxe2 (or 15 Qxb4 Rc2+ 16 Kb1 Rxc4+) 15 ... Qxc4+ 16 Qc3 Qxb5 17 Nd4 Qxd5 with a decisive material advantage.

14 b3! was White's only hope. Despite an imposing position, it's not clear how Black can break down White's defences, although 14 ... c6!? is probably a good place to start.

14 ... Bg6?!

14 ... Nxc4! 15 Bxc4 Qxc4 16 gxf5 Nxd5! was the clearest route, threatening the deadly ... Ne3. It requires some deep and precise calculation, but there aren't many branches to consider. After the forced 17 Qd4 Qc6 18 Qa4, Black can simply swap down to a winning endgame with 18 ... Nxc3 19 Rxd8+ Kxd8! 20 Qxc6 Nxa2+ 21 Kb1 Re1+ 22 Kxa2 bxc6.



Despite having an extra piece, White's forces are completely helpless. Black is winning.

15 Nh3?!

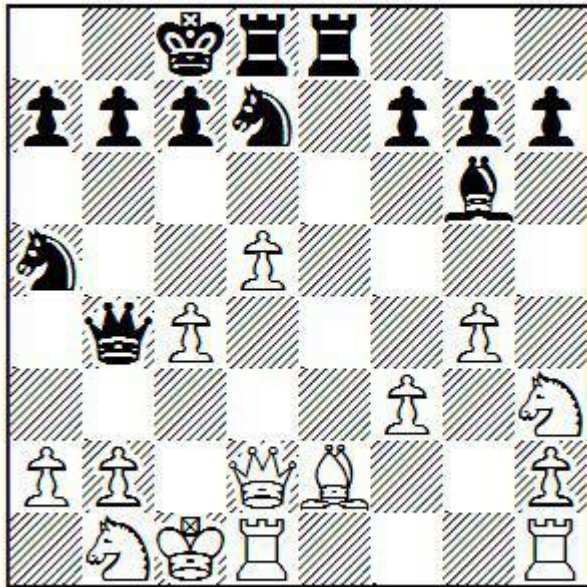
15 b3! was again White's only resource, after which 15 ... c6! is unclear.

15 ... Nd7?!

Another inaccuracy, but one can certainly understand the cute idea that tempted Hodgson into this relocation. 15 ... Nxc4 is clearly better for Black.

16 Nb1??

16 Ne4! was the only try, blocking off the sharp-shooting black bishop, when White has good chances to escape the onslaught.



16 ... Qb3!

Very nice. It's all over.

17 Bd3 Qxa2! 18 Qb4 Re2! 19 Bxe2 Nb3+ 20 Qxb3 Qxb3 21 Rd2 Qe3 0-1

Inspirational Game #3

In recent years, the popularity of 3 ... Bg4 has waned at top levels, so much so that only two grandmasters still regularly play this opening with the black pieces. You're listening to one of them, and the other is the talented Filipino GM Darwin Laylo. The following is a good example of his uncompromising handling of our favourite weapon.

K.Goh Wei Ming-D.Laylo

Manila 2008

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4!?

Usually this move is at least a mild surprise to White, although Laylo is something of a 3 ... Bg4 devotee.

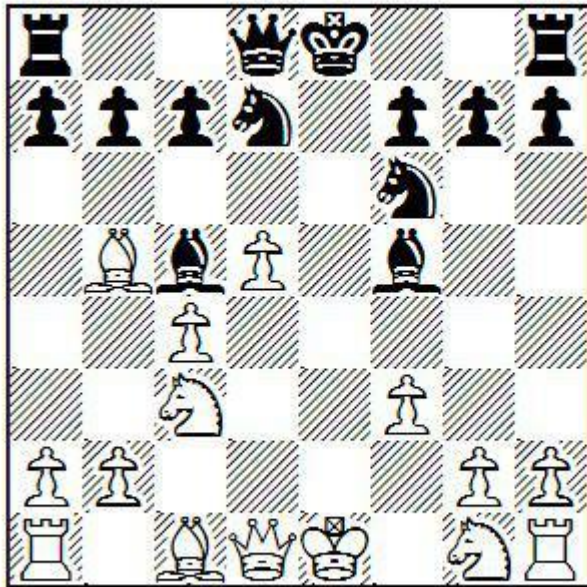
4 f3!

Kevin, a noted theoretician, plays in the most principled fashion. If Black decides to throw opening principles to the wind and sacrifice a pawn from the get-go, surely White can just take it – right?

4 ... Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 c4 e6! 7 dxe6 Bxe6 8 d5 Bf5 9 Nc3

The critical main line of the Jadoul variation, given by several sources as the most principled response to 3 ... Bg4.

9 ... Bc5



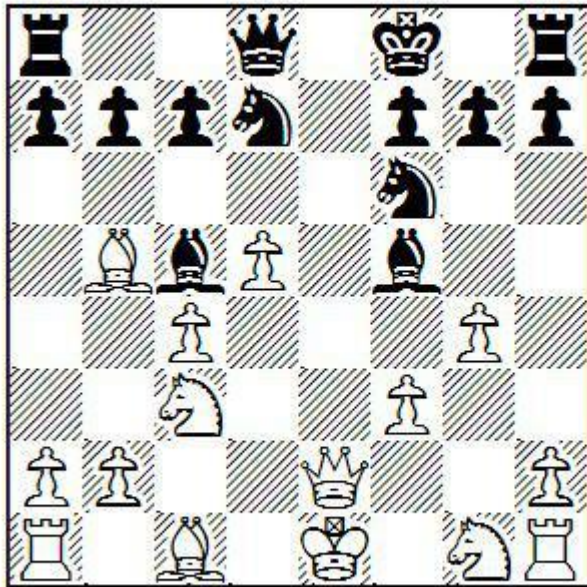
One of five viable alternatives for Black's ninth move. The black bishops make an impressive duo with their control of their symmetric diagonals.

10 Qe2+ Kf8!?

10 ... Qe7 is the very sound alternative. Black's initiative extends into the queenless middlegame.

11 g4?

Continuing in an aggressive fashion but running into a violent refutation.



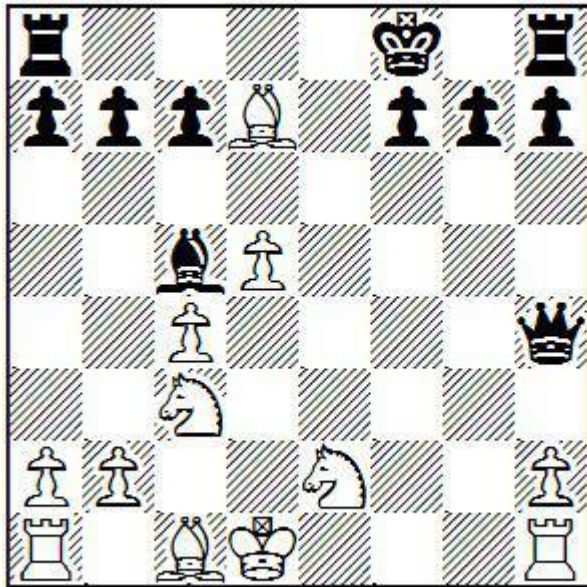
11 ... Nxg4!! 12 fxg4 Qh4+ 13 Kd1?

13 Kf1?? Bd3! wins the white queen. 13 Kd2! is White's best chance, although 13 ... Bxg4 14 Nf3 Qh6+ 15 Kc2 Qg6+ 16 Kb3 c6! leaves Black with a commanding attack.

13 ... Bxg4 14 Bxd7!

The best practical try. If 14 Nf3 Qh5 15 Rf1 then 15 ... Ne5! wins back the piece with interest.

14 ... Bxe2+ 15 Ngxe2

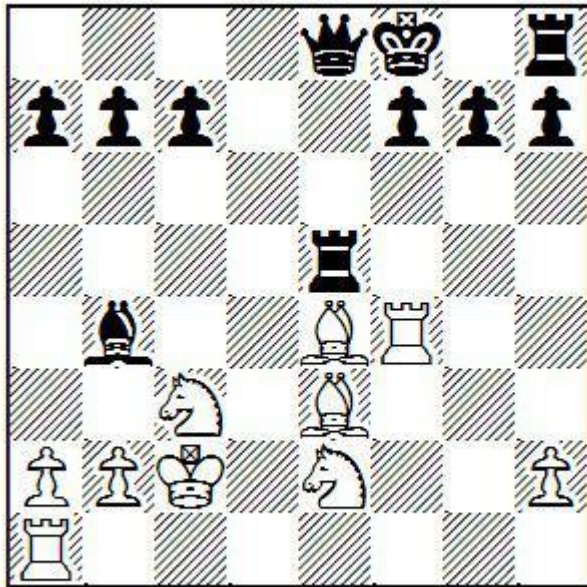


White has enough material for the queen, at least for the time being. The real problem is that the white king remains perilously exposed. Black must continue to pile on the pressure without allowing White any respite.

15 ... Rd8! 16 Bf5 Qxc4 17 Kc2 Rxd5 18 Rf1 Bb4 19 Be3

19 Be6?? loses to 19 ... Qd3+ 20 Kb3 Bxc3!.

19 ... Re5 20 Rf4 Qc6 21 Be4! Qe8!



These two players represent the new wave of very strong tacticians coming out of Asian chess, and in this game they don't disappoint. Laylo has snatched a bunch of pawns, but his kingside is undeveloped and vulnerable, while the white forces are beginning to look threatening for the first time in the game. Black is still clearly better, but this is the sort of sharp position that can turn on a dime.



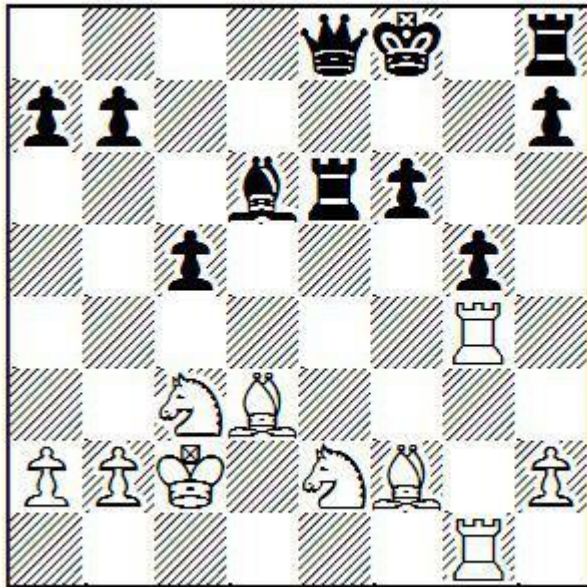
GM Darwin Laylo – one of the few grandmasters today to regularly play the Portuguese.

22 Bd4 Re6 23 Rg1

23 Raf1! was more testing.

23 ... f6 24 Bd3 Bd6! 25 Rfg4 c5! 26 Bf2 g5!

Very precise! Laylo finds the most accurate means of defence – pushing forward. Black's extra pawns do a great job of barricading the kingside.



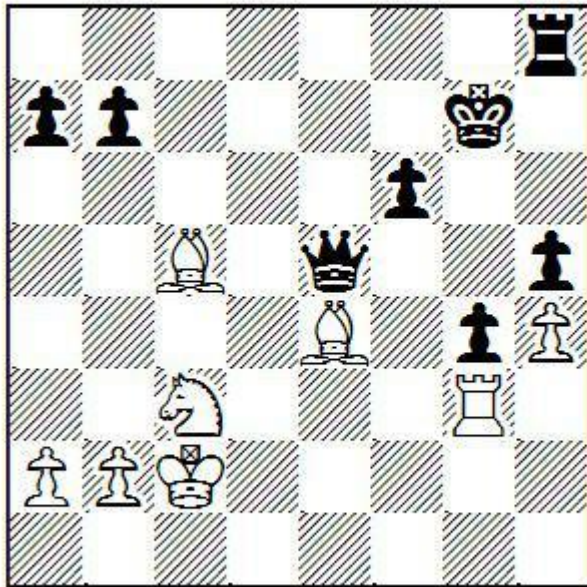
27 h4 h5 28 Re4

28 Ra4! g4 29 Rd1! would have given White more chances.

28 ... g4 29 Ng3 Bxg3 30 Bxc5+?

Losing, but the alternatives weren't too attractive. For example, 30 Bxg3 Rxe4 31 Bxe4 (31 Nxe4?? c4! wins a piece) 31 ... Kg7 leaves Black's king surprisingly safe behind his wall of foot soldiers. Meanwhile, the black pawns on the queenside are ready to launch their own assault. Black should win with a certain degree of care.

30 ... Kg7 31 Rxg3 Rxe4 32 Bxe4 Qe5!



White's pieces are unfortunately placed and cannot all be defended.

33 Bf2 Qf4 34 Rg2 Rc8! 35 Bxb7

Or 35 Kd3 Rd8+ 36 Bd4 Rxd4+! 37 Kxd4 f5 and wins.

35 ... Rc7 36 Ba8 Qa4+! 37 Kb1 Qe8! 0-1

A cute finish. If 38 Bd5, then 38 ... Rxc3 39 bxc3 Qb5+ wins the bishop.

How to Use This Book

Often when I buy a new opening book, I get put off by the fact that it seems like I will have to learn hundreds of pages of theory before I can start trying out my new weapon. To combat this, I have designed this book in a very specific way.

As you have no doubt noted, this is quite a weighty work, full of reams of previously-unpublished analysis, explanation and games, the likes of which are far beyond the average person's capacity to memorize. But never fear: tucked within these pages is a crash-course on our repertoire that encapsulates the minimum requirements for learning this opening to enable a player to employ it with confidence. **This 'mini-book', about a third of the total pages, consists of each chapter's introduction and illustrative games.** While I have always believed that illustrative games are the best way to learn a new opening, here I have gone further by choosing and analysing games to ensure that all of the key lines are covered, so that the reader is well prepared to try out the lines in practice without facing any nasty surprises.

So, for the lazy theoreticians, I have designed the book so that going through these chapter introductions and illustrative games will be enough to get you by, at least until you have the time or inclination to look deeper into the theory. In fact, for anyone learning this opening for the first time, I recommend this as a good way to get a feel for things without running the risk of being caught out in a theoretical trap during your games. If you are starting out with this repertoire, this mini-book is where you should first focus your attention, learning the bare essentials and then going off and trying it out 'in the field'.

An excellent five-step process towards mastering the variations is:

1. Read the chapter introductions and illustrative games.
2. Start to play our opening in less serious outings, either online, in blitz games, or with friends.
3. Go back and check the theory for the lines that caused you problems.
4. Start to play the opening in 'real' games.
5. Learn the theory in more depth.

Of course, if you are the sort of person who can read an openings book cover to cover and then unleash it against the first grandmaster you see, by all means be my guest!

A note on structure and language

This book is broken up into five sections according to White's choice on the third move. The sections are loosely ordered in terms of how frequently each variation for White is seen in practice. For example, Section One (3 d4 Bg4) is by far the largest, comprising over half of the overall material, which reflects the fact that you can expect to encounter 3 d4 roughly half the time after 2 exd5 Nf6.

There are a couple of other features of this book that are a little unusual with respect to mainstream opening literature. There are few

strong players in modern times who employ our system with the black pieces – of the grandmasters, only Darwin Laylo and your author play it regularly – which reduces the pile of top-level games from which we can draw. Consequently, you will find an unusually high number of blitz games, mainly my own, used for illustration throughout the book. Bear this in mind whenever you see a reference cited as ‘Internet’, but be assured that every game has been thoroughly checked with strong engines.

At the other end of the spectrum, I have also included quite a lot of high-level correspondence games. This is a resource often ignored in opening works, despite correspondence databases being almost unquestionably the best source for correct opening theory.

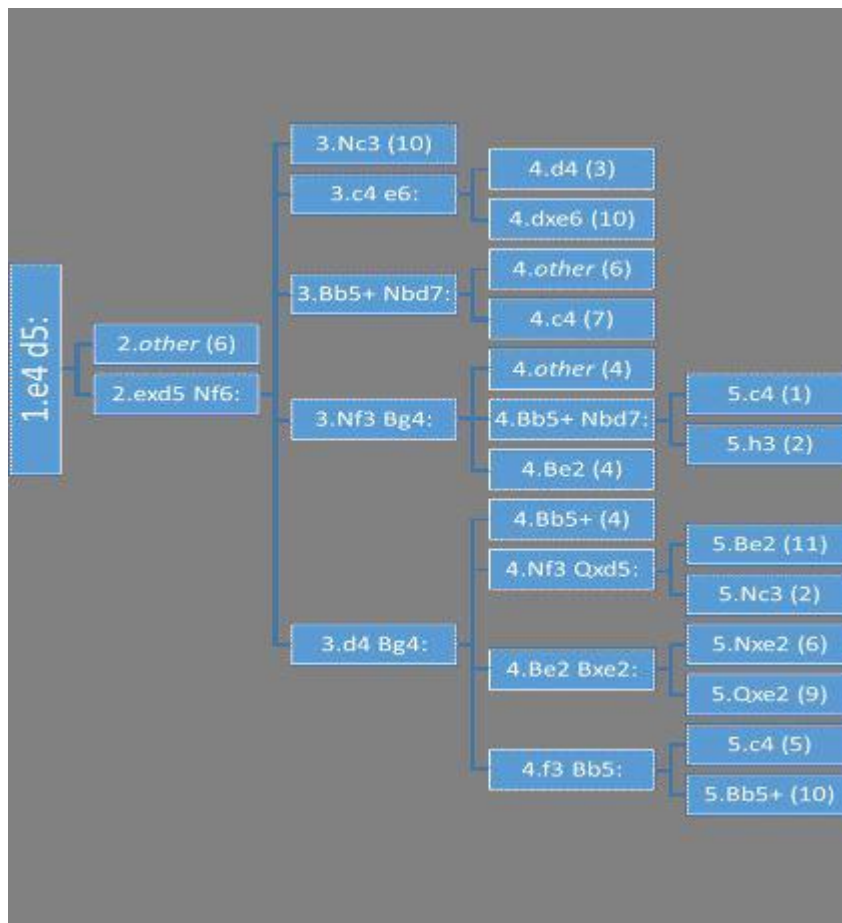
There are, however, a few important variations throughout the book that simply haven’t occurred in recorded practice before in any form of chess. In these cases, I have made use of sophisticated computer simulations, running matches between powerful chess engines for hours and sometimes days at a time from the comfort of my office. You will see these games appear in the analysis from time to time; they are easy to spot with their very computer-like player names (*Stockfish*, *Houdini*, etc), as well as the tournaments recorded as a computer ‘Shootout’. Sometimes parts of these high-level silicon clashes can be hard for us humans to understand, but there is no question that their objective quality is top-notch.

One final note with respect to language, as there seem to be no clear grammatical rules in chess writings. I have capitalized ‘Black’ and ‘White’ when these words refer to the generic players in a game, while the corresponding adjectives and adverbs are without capitals. You will also soon discover that I have chosen to use the feminine pronoun when talking about these hypothetical individuals. Nothing insidious is meant by this. Using ‘she’ as the generic pronoun has become common in academic literature to challenge the tendency to write as if the audience was only male. In chess literature, the rather antiquated trend remains to use ‘he’ as the standard; I am simply bucking the trend.

I’m sure you didn’t pick up this book for a grammatical discussion, so let’s get stuck into the chess. We begin with the largest and most important section of the book: the Portuguese Complex.

One Hundred Games

This is a quick graphic to give you an idea of the frequency of our opening repertoire's branches in practice. For a hundred games starting with 1 e4 d5, it shows how many times you can expect to face each line.



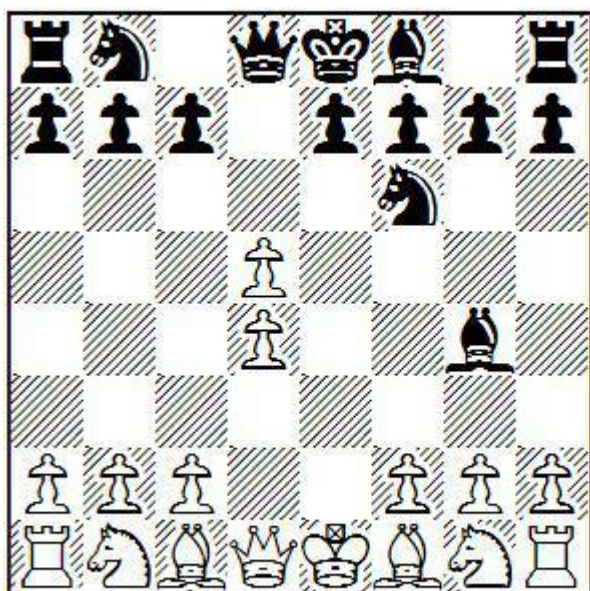
Section One

The Portuguese Complex

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4

By far White's most popular move. Now Black 'should' play in traditional Scandinavian fashion with 3 ... Nxd5, recapturing her pawn but giving White control of the centre and easy development. However, we have no interest in such banalities.

3 ... Bg4!?



An audacious, almost impertinent incursion. Black shuns the chance to regain the sacrificed material in order to go immediately on the offensive. Is this justified? Not really. Do we care? Not at all. The diagram signals the start of my favourite opening in the entire history of chess. It has been called, depending on your company, everything from “the Portuguese opening” to “the Jadoul variation” to “utter rubbish”. In the late eighties, two players from Belgium, Michel Jadoul and Pascal Vandervoort, made a name for themselves with

this gambit, although according to my database it was first played regularly by the relatively unknown Antonio Rey Pereira in 1986. The system didn't really take off until the nineties, when three imaginative players from Portugal – Rui Damaso, Luis Galego and Carlos Pereira Santos – used it to beat a number of strong masters, including in the legendary Portugal-China match of 1996. Further acknowledgement should be directed towards the talented Ukrainian GM Sergei Krivoshey, as well as the strong correspondence master Patrick Spitz. In short, this exciting variation has several heroes but no clear name!

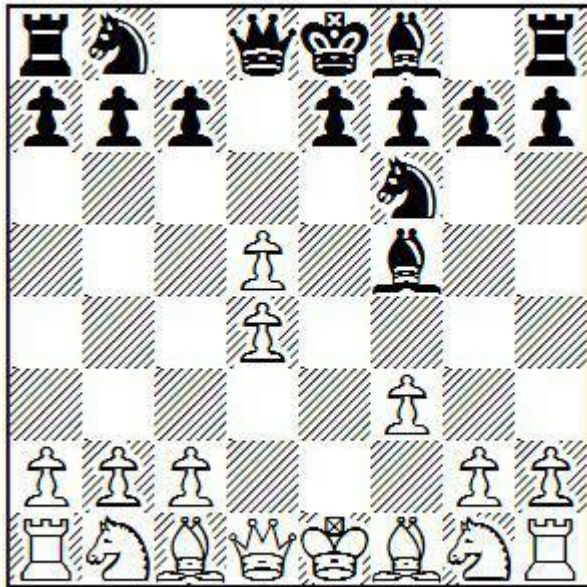
I have tried to credit the chief contributors to this opening by attaching their names to different lines as we discuss them. The starting position in the diagram will be referred to simply as the Portuguese Complex, as this is the label with which I was brought up. Leaving the naming debate aside, however, the material in this section can broadly be thought of as divided into two parts: approaches in which White plays f2-f3, and those in which she avoids this weakness. We will consider the variations in this order.

Fundamentally ...

4 f3

... is the critical test of Black's strategy. Without this move (either immediately, or after 4 Bb5+), White cannot guarantee the win of a pawn. On the other hand, this voluntary weakening of White's defences, without having yet developed a single piece, is exactly what Black is trying to provoke. The pawn cannot be replaced on f2, and so, unless White is well prepared, this move entails a high degree of risk. After ...

4 ... Bf5



White is now committed to trying to justify having irreparably diminished her kingside defences. She can do this in one of two ways: either securing her extra pawn, or launching a quick all-or-nothing assault on Black's position. The first strategy involves playing c2-c4, either on move five or six. 5 c4 e6 – 'the Banker' – is without a doubt one of the most enjoyable opening variations for Black to play over the board, and it's not surprising that the statistics are heavily weighted in her favour. On the other hand, the move-order 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 c4 ('the Jadoul') constitutes what is commonly thought of as the main line after 3 d4 Bg4, but, as we shall see, this is perhaps not as critical for Black's system as has been previously assumed.

The second strategy – a quick attack – is rarer in practice, but is in my opinion a far more dangerous test. This approach will necessitate White further weakening her structure with g2-g4. However, there is some logic to this primitive push. White drives Black's minor pieces back by launching her kingside pawns down the board, reminding her opponent that Black's development and king safety – at least for the moment – aren't anything to be proud of either. White has two ways to undertake this: by combining Bb5+, Nc3 and g2-g4 ('the Melbourne Shuffle'), or via the immediate g2-g4 followed by c2-c4,

Nc3 and g4-g5 ('the Correspondence Refutation'). The former is tricky and definitely worthy of our attention, but is ultimately reasonably simple to handle. The latter, as the name suggests, is a far more serious attempt at a refutation. When all is eventually said and done about chess opening theory, this may be the line that casts doubt on the longevity of our system. White is in effect taking a leaf out of our own book by trying to blow us away in the opening. However, in a practical, over-the-board game, White must expose herself to perilous risks in adopting this method, and a well-prepared player can be confident of rebuffing White's brutish approach.

The final chapters of the section consider variations in which White avoids 4 f3. The 'Wuss' (4 Be2) is very common in practice, and is a natural, solid response by a player startled by 3 ... Bg4. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Black's attacking opportunities are only slightly dampened by the exchange of light-squared bishops. The 'Lusophobe' (4 Bb5+ Nbd7 5 Be2) is another attempt to take the fun out of our opening, inducing Black to play a future ... Nxd5 instead of the more active recapture with the queen. This indeed does diminish the chances of Black brilliantly checkmating her opponent in under twenty moves, but from a theoretical perspective, White's approach shouldn't worry us. For those with an uncontrollable blood lust, however, I have included a chapter on the rare but surprisingly venomous option 4 ... c6!? (the 'Elbow'). This delightfully romantic gambit deserves more attention, in my opinion, and practically forces White to accept the pawn and hand the initiative to Black.

Finally, the final chapter of Section One is, I'm afraid to say, a bit of a theoretical jungle. The popular 'Classical' variation, whereby White plays Nf3 and d2-d4, can arise via various move-orders and even from the more orthodox 2 ... Qxd5 Scandinavian. There are myriads of possible transpositions, which I have tried to cover in full as well as giving you a sort of roadmap to make your journey easier. The good news is that there are plenty of traps into which White can fall, so a fair knowledge of these lines can easily pick you up some cheap points.

The outline above may give you an idea of why I am always so delighted to see 3 d4 appear on my board. No matter the merits nor

the follow-up, I know that we are guaranteed to have an exciting, rambunctious battle, packed full of tactics, irregularities and the possibility of winning a brilliant miniature!

Remember that each chapter starts with a brief introduction followed by one or two illustrative games. This material isn't just meant as an appetizer; I have pieced together just enough to get you started in learning each variation, and it should prepare you to try out the lines over the board (or the internet). After the illustrative games of each chapter, the theoretical main course is presented, followed by a very brief conclusion.

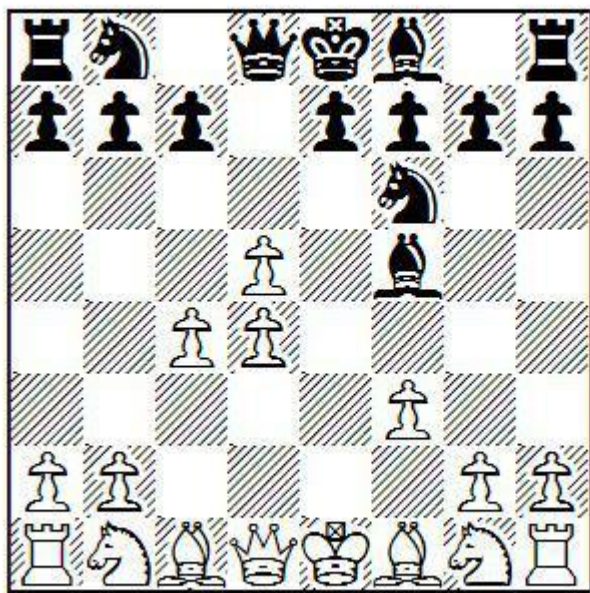
On to the chess. Buckle up and hold on tight to your wallet, because we're going to kick things off with the Banker.

Chapter One

The Banker

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 c4

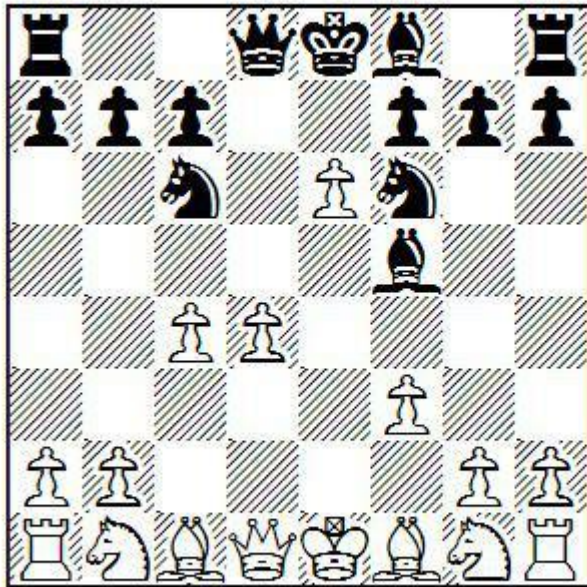


This is the most natural and (at first glance) critical continuation, securing the extra pawn on d5. However, for her troubles, White is falling dangerously behind in development. Play now becomes extremely sharp, with excellent chances for Black to execute dazzling checkmates and score brilliant victories without White ever escaping the opening.

5 ... e6!

Continuing to develop. This chapter will analyse the greedy 6 dxe6, White's most popular move, which I have thus christened 'the Banker'. It will also consider White's other alternatives, none of which should worry us to any great extent.

6 dxe6 Nc6!



A lovely move to play. Black offers yet another pawn, as well as volunteering to give up the right to castle, all in the name of rapid, targeted piece development. Should White capture on f7 (now, or on the next move), Black's pieces will spring into action to optimal locations. Typically, Black will endeavour to put a rook on e8 as soon as possible (either after ... Bb4 or ... Qe7), after which she can immediately look for tactics. The c6-knight has a natural route into White's position via b4, where it eyes d3 and c2, but quite often it can instead sacrifice itself on d4 to allow for a quick ... Bc5. Black's queen will usually find herself on e7 for a lethal doubling on the e-file, though occasionally she causes havoc on other squares on the d8-h4 diagonal. As for our knight on f6 – always be on the lookout for ... Ng4 ideas!

White will almost certainly be forced to play Be3 (to guard d4) and Kf2 (to diffuse the pressure on the e-file) at some point. We will typically answer this with an explosive ... Rxe3 sacrifice, the key theme for the Banker variation. This is usually followed up with either an immediate ... Nxd4, or else doubling on the e-file. In fact, as a general rule of thumb, ... Rxe3 is almost always the right move when it is available, even if you cannot see an immediate forced win.

White's dark squares, critically weakened by both the pawn on f3 and the loss of her queen's bishop, will be ripe for exploitation.

This has to be one of the most enjoyable variations of the Scandinavian for Black to get at the board, and it's not surprising that the statistics are heavily weighted in Black's favour. But before we examine the theory, let's have a look at how easy it is for an unsuspecting opponent to get into trouble with the white pieces in this deliciously exciting variation.

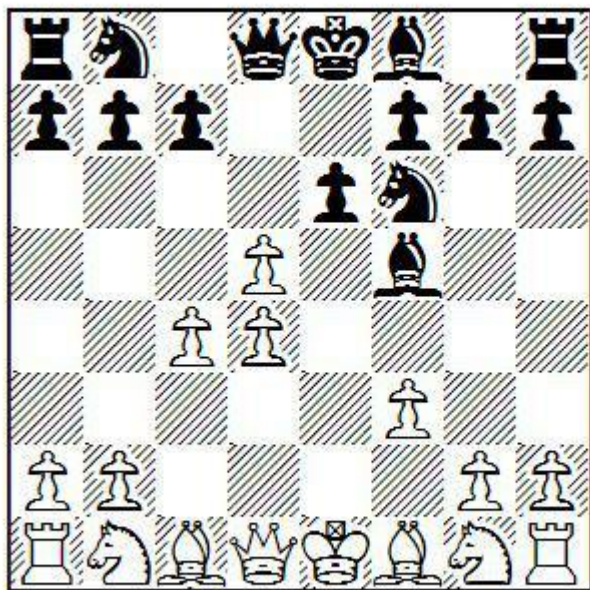
Game 1

C.Onyekwere-D.Smerdon

Internet (blitz) 2013

Yes, this is only an online blitz game, but it gives a very good illustration of the pitfalls awaiting White in the Banker. My opponent, one of Nigeria's strongest players, is certainly no patzer, and yet, the hazards of our favourite opening proved deadly in under twenty moves.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 c4 e6



White's scepticism of our unprincipled gambit can often inspire a strategy of greedily going for the maximum – after all, a pawn is a

pawn, right? But to do this entails making five pawn moves in a row and usually at least one more by 6 dxe6. The loss of time, combined with the weaknesses created by 4 f3, gives us all the justification we need to launch an immediate assault on White's position. It's not surprising that Black's score in practice is extremely impressive.

6 dxe6

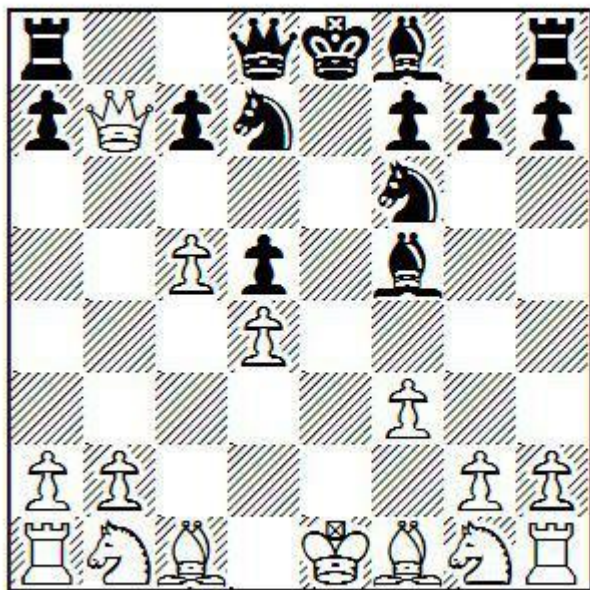
In for a penny, in for a pound. Having weakened the kingside, White has no real choice but to carry on and at least grab some material.

Instead:

a) 6 g4? is an unfortunate attempt to transpose into the *Correspondence Refutation*, but it really doesn't work here: 6 ... Nxg4!! 7 fxg4 Qh4+ 8 Kd2 (8 Ke2?? Bxg4+ 9 Nf3 Bxf3+ 10 Kxf3 Qh5+ wins the queen) 8 ... Be4 9 Nf3 Qf2+ and Black is clearly better.

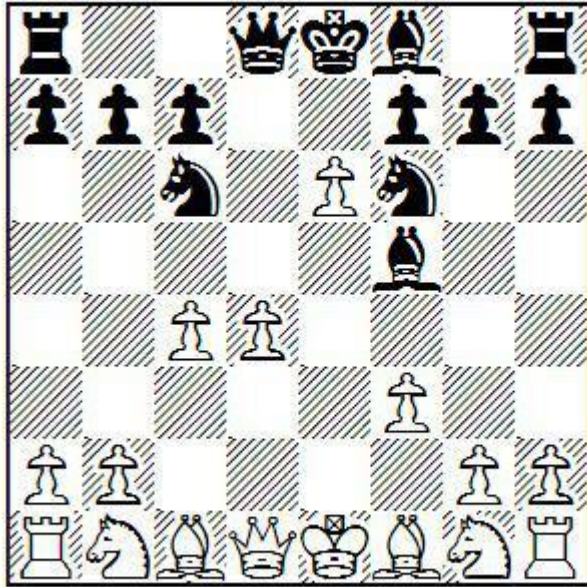
b) 6 Nc3 exd5 7 g4 Be6! is very promising for Black.

c) 6 Qb3?! exd5! 7 Qxb7 Nbd7 8 c5



8 ... Bxc5! gives Black a decisive attack. For example, 9 dxc5 Rb8!! 10 Qxa7 0-0 11 Qa3 Qe7+ 12 Ne2 Nxc5! and White's king will not survive much longer, because 13 Kf2 Bxb1! 14 Rxb1 Nce4+! leads to a winning endgame for Black.

6 ... Nc6!



This is the position that inspired me, and I'm sure many other club players, to take up the Portuguese. Black shows a complete disregard for material, initiating this double pawn sacrifice to prioritize rapid development. Engines already evaluate our compensation as being completely sufficient, Black has a tremendous score in practical play, and you're actually likely to get it about once in every 25 outings against 1 e4. Furthermore, it's incredibly fun to play. Need I say more?

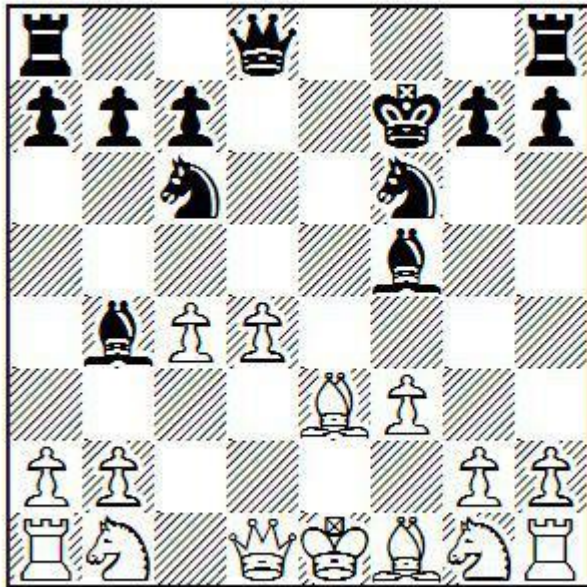
7 exf7+

Taking greediness to a whole new level.

7 ... Kxf7 8 Be3?

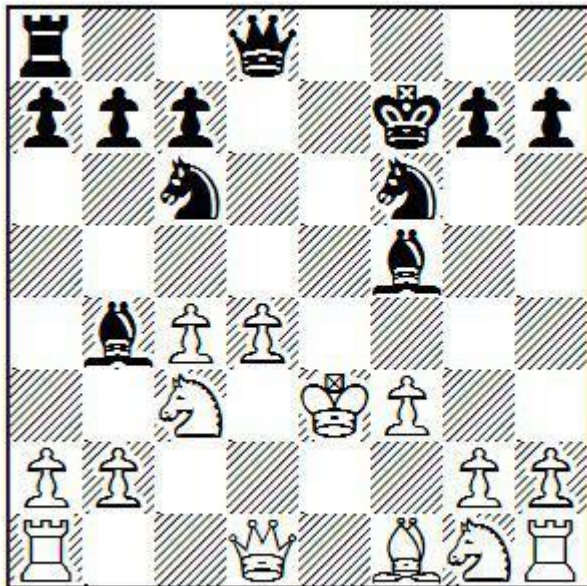
As often happens in this variation, a seemingly natural developing move for White can equal an immediate loss.

8 ... Bb4+



9 Kf2

9 Nc3 is best, but still losing: 9 ... Re8 10 Kf2 (or 10 Qd2 Qxd4! and White's position collapses) 10 ... Rxe3!! (the standard treatment) 11 Kxe3

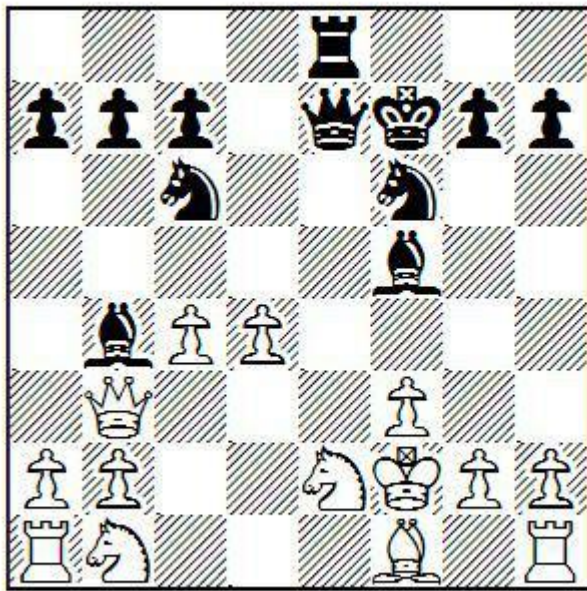


11 ... Bc2!! (the strongest and definitely the prettiest, but it's worth noting the two other ways Black could win, as they represent

common tactical motifs for this variation: 11 ... Qe7+ 12 Kf2 Nxd4! 13 Qxd4 Bc5 wins the queen; and 11 ... Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Qe7+ 13 Kd2 Rd8 is another way to pick up the dame) 12 Qd2 Ng4+!! 13 fxc4 (or 13 Kf4 Bd6+ 14 Kxc4 Bf5+! 15 Kxf5 Qh4 and mate in two) 13 ... Qg5+ 0-1 Ge.Sergeev-D.Saulin, Tula 2005.

9 ... Re8 10 a3

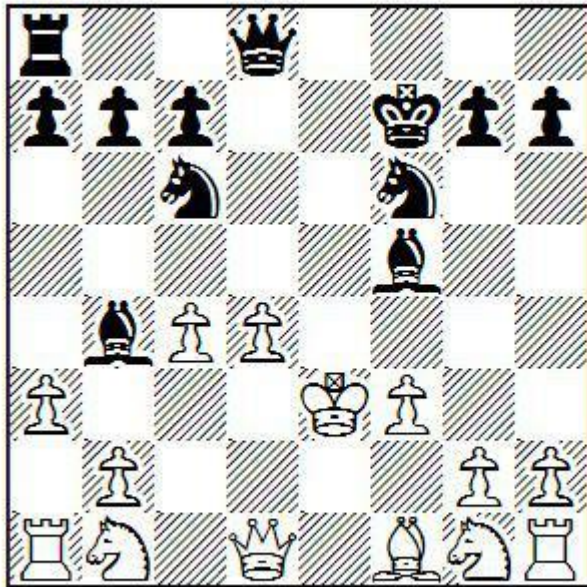
Or 10 Ne2 Rxe3!! (you should be getting used to this by now!) 11 Kxe3 Qe7+ (11 ... Nxd4 and 11 ... Ne5!? also win) 12 Kf2 Re8 13 Qb3



13 ... Nxd4! 14 Nxd4 Qe1+ 15 Kg1 Bc5 and mate in nine more moves.

10 ... Rxe3! 11 Kxe3

11 axb4 Rd3!! finishes the game.



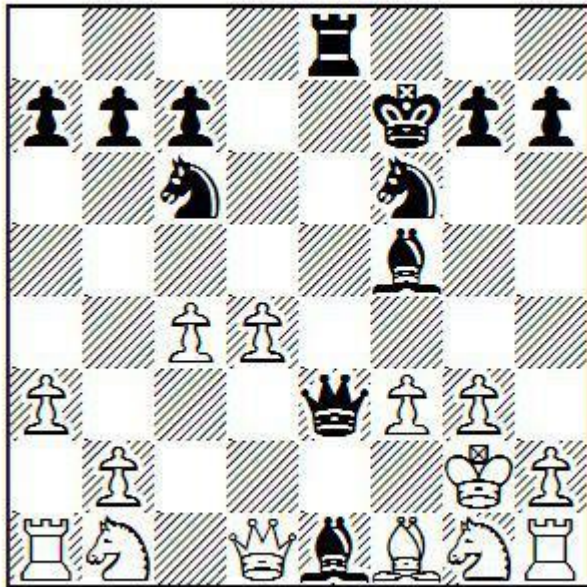
11 ... Qe7+?

Black had a choice of attractive wins; I failed to find the most convincing continuation. 11 ... Be1!!, delivering mate in 18 (!), was definitely the most aesthetic finisher. Just gorgeous. 11 ... Nxd4 and 11 ... Bc5 would also win swiftly.

12 Kf2 Re8 13 g3?

13 Be2! would make Black's conversion attempts somewhat problematic, although the attack is still very powerful.

13 ... Qe3+ 14 Kg2 Be1!!



Another common theme to remember.

15 Nh3 Nxd4 16 Nc3 Nxf3! 17 Be2 Nh4+ 0-1

Mate follows.

Game 2

L.Dworakowski-A.Moll

Groningen 1997

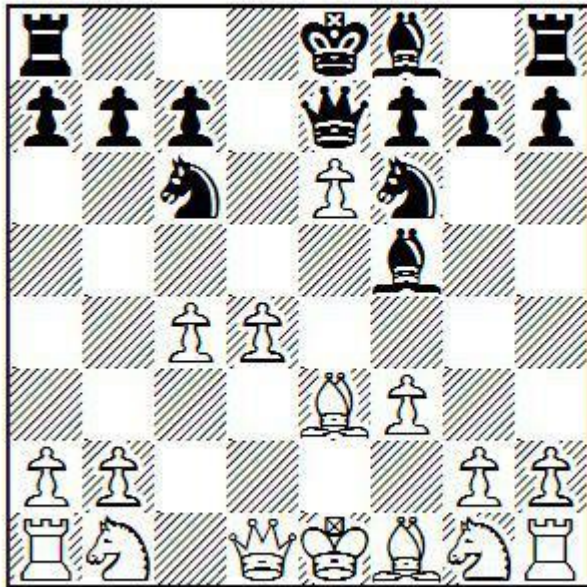
This game is one of early 'classics' of 3 ... Bg4, back in the days when White was often taken completely unawares by Black's system. Here the white player, over 200 points stronger than his opponent, decides to refute Black's opening by taking all of the offered gifts. I bet you can guess how that turned out ...

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 c4 e6 6 dxe6 Nc6 7 Be3!

Much better.

In addition to the suicidal 7 exf7+? (as in the previous game), White often tries 7 d5?. However, after 7 ... Nb4 8 Na3 fxe6, Black is already clearly better. For example, 9 Bd2 exd5 10 Qa4+ Bd7 11 Qb3 Qe7+! 12 Kf2 0-0-0 13 Re1 Qc5+ 14 Be3 d4! and White only lasted a few more moves in *MickMagpie* (2313)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014.

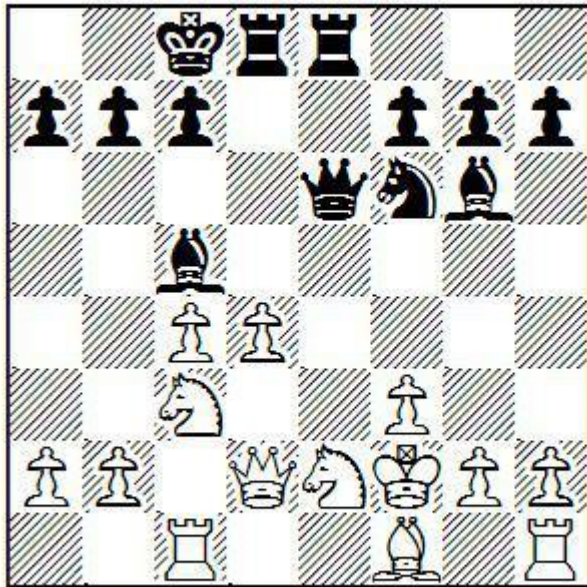
7 ... Qe7!



Not as popular as 7 ... Bb4+, but definitely better. Black's queen takes aim at White's king along the dangerous, soon-to-be-opened e-file.

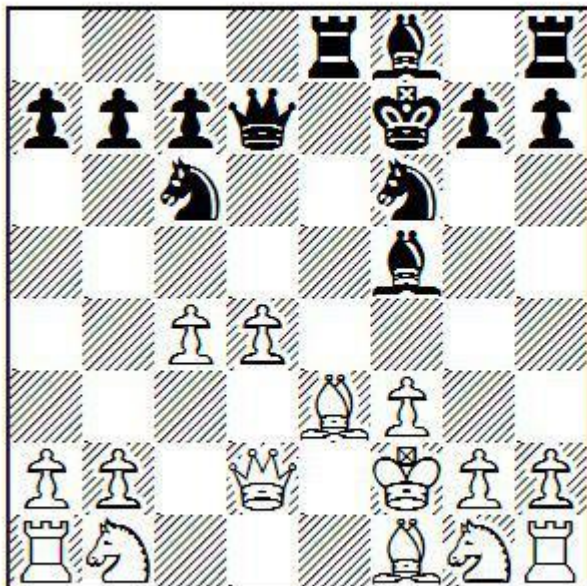
8 exf7+

8 Nc3 0-0-0! also gives Black a handy initiative. One blitz game I played just a few weeks before finishing this book continued 9 Nge2? (an obvious developing move, but, as so often in this opening, White can find that the natural move can easily be a serious mistake; 9 Qd2 is a better try, though Black retains a dangerous initiative after 9 ... Nb4! 10 0-0-0 Qxe6; e.g. 11 a3?? Nc2 12 Bf2 Na1!, winning) 9 ... Nb4! 10 Ng3 Nc2+ 11 Kf2 Bg6 12 Rc1 Nxe3 13 Kxe3 Qxe6+ 14 Kf2 Bc5! 15 Nge2 Rhe8 16 Qd2



16 ... Ng4+!! (an easy move to play, even in blitz – the position is just calling out for this sacrifice) 17 fxe4 Qf6+ 18 Ke1 Rxd4! 19 Nd5 Qh4+ 20 g3 Qxg4 21 Qa5 Rxd5! and Black soon won in *Jartorio* (2298)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2015.

8 ... Kxf7 9 Kf2 Re8 10 Qd2 Qd7!



A key move. Black's queen has done an excellent job, causing far more mischief than the temporary inconvenience to her own kingside. Nevertheless, now is the time to make room for the bishop and rooks to join the attack. Black is all set to unleash the typical motif ... Rxe3 and ... Nxd4.

11 Nc3

The novelty 11 c5! is best, though 11 ... Rxe3! 12 Qxe3 Nxd4 13 Bc4+ Be6! still gives Black a very dangerous attack for the material.

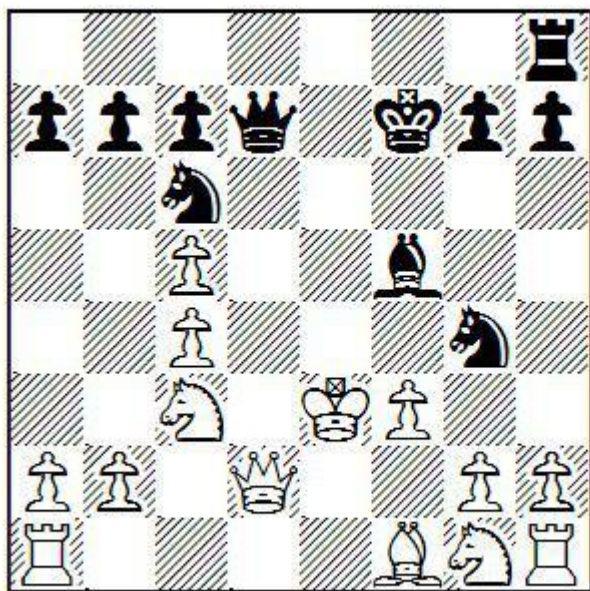
11 ... Rxe3!!

Of course!

12 Kxe3 Bc5

Admirable, but not best. 12 ... g6! 13 Kf2 Nxd4 was crushing.

13 dxc5 Ng4+!



Every black move is with tempo, a feature of this opening. White is never given a moment's rest to develop.

14 Ke2

14 fxg4?? Re8+ wins the queen.

14 ... Qe6+?

14 ... Qe7+! 15 Ne4 (15 Kd1?? Ne3+ 16 Kc1 Nxf1 is winning) 15 ... Rd8 would force White to find 16 Qf4! Nd4+ 17 Ke1 Nc2+ 18 Ke2 and the game should end in a draw.

15 Kd1 Ne3+ 16 Kc1

Already White's fifth king move!

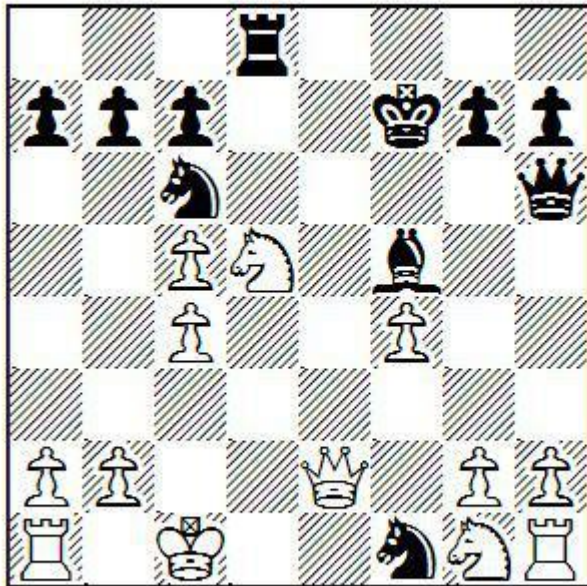
16 ... Rd8

16 ... Nxf1?? 17 Nh3! is why 14 ... Qe7! was preferable.

17 Nd5 Nxf1 18 Qe2?

White buckles under the pressure. Again 18 Nh3!! is a lovely winning shot. But alas, now the white king is in mortal danger.

18 ... Qh6+! 19 f4



19 ... Rxd5!!

Another cracking sacrifice, ripping away White's last defensive bastion.

20 Qxf1

Or 20 cxd5 Qxf4+ 21 Kd1 Ne3+ and it's all over.

20 ... Rd4! 21 Ne2 Rxc4+

21 ... Qe6! wins on the spot and would have been a fitting end to a highly energetic performance. Instead, the ratings of the players begin to show (Black was only 2115) and the game takes a few entertaining twists and turns, before Black eventually walks away with a well-earned victory.

22 Kd1 Bg4 23 h3 Rd4+?!

23 ... Rxf4! was still winning.

24 Ke1 Bxe2 25 Qxe2 Qg6 26 f5?

White collapses. Black had let his opponent off the hook somewhat, and now 26 Kf2! would have even given White the better of things.

26 ... Qg3+ 27 Kf1 Rf4+ 28 Kg1 Nd4! 29 Qh5+ Kf8 30 Rf1 Rh4?

30 ... Re4! and 31 ... Ne2+ wins quickly.

31 Qd1 Re4 32 Rf2 Re1+ 33 Qxe1 Nf3+ 34 Kf1??

34 Rxf3! is unclear, after all of that!

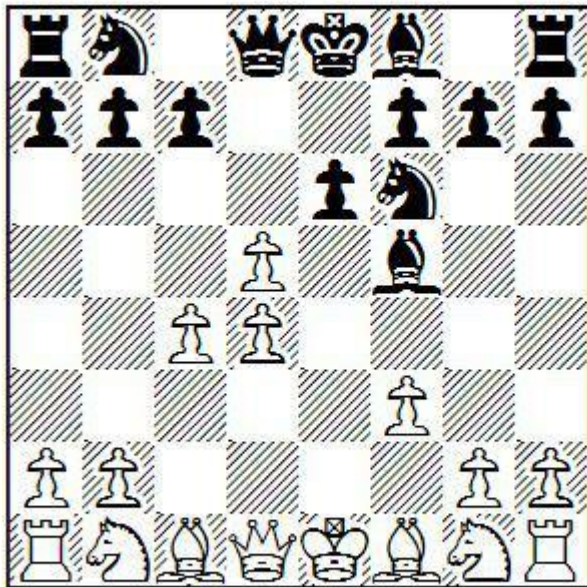
34 ... Nxe1 35 Kxe1 Qe3+ 36 Re2 Qc1+ 0-1

A fitting final result to an inspiring performance by Black, despite a rollercoaster of mutual errors along the way.

With that, we move into our first 'Theory' section. About two-thirds of this book is made up of theory, but remember that I have written the chapter introductions and illustrative games to be enough by themselves to give you all the essential knowledge about each variation in order to get you started. If this is your first read-through, you may wish to skip ahead to the next part of the 'mini-book': the introduction to Chapter 2.

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 c4 e6!



Capturing on e6 is the most popular move by an overwhelming margin, but in my opinion it is already a mistake: White will have to walk a tightrope of tactics just to stay alive. This is White's last chance to try to bail out with the rare 6 Nc3!? (played roughly 5% of

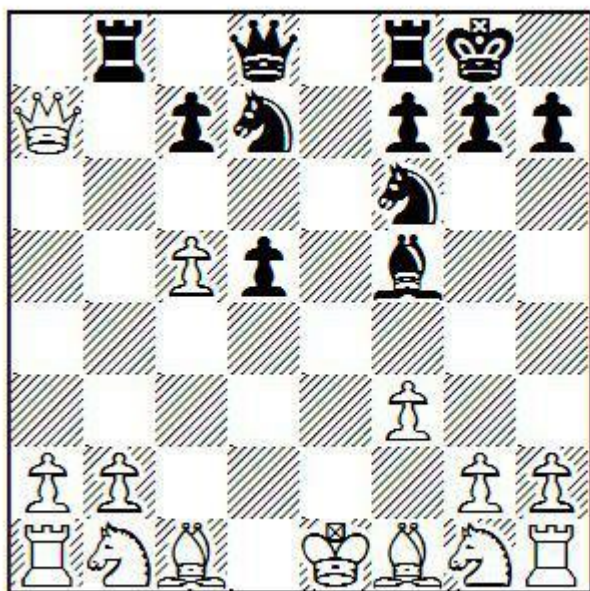
the time, according to my database), though here, too, life is hardly peaceful for the white monarch.

6 dxe6

Other moves:

a) 6 g4? Nxg4! is an immediate disaster. After 7 fxg4 Qh4+ 8 Kd2 (not 8 Ke2?? Bxg4+ 9 Nf3 Bxf3+ 10 Kxf3 Qh5+, winning the white queen) 8 ... Be4! 9 Nf3 Qf2+!, Black regains all of the sacrificed material, while keeping her other advantages.

b) 6 Qb3?! is a greedy suggestion of some computer engines. However, it doesn't take much for a human to recognize that playing only with pawns and a queen in the opening invites trouble: 6 ... exd5 7 Qxb7 Nbd7 8 c5 (White is desperately trying to keep the centre closed; instead, 8 Nc3 Rb8! 9 Qxa7 Bb4! gives Black a tremendous lead in development for two rather insignificant queenside pawns – White will be lucky to survive the opening) 8 ... Bxc5!! 9 dxc5 Rb8! (a great novelty) 10 Qxa7 0-0! gives Black an unstoppable initiative for the sacrificed material.

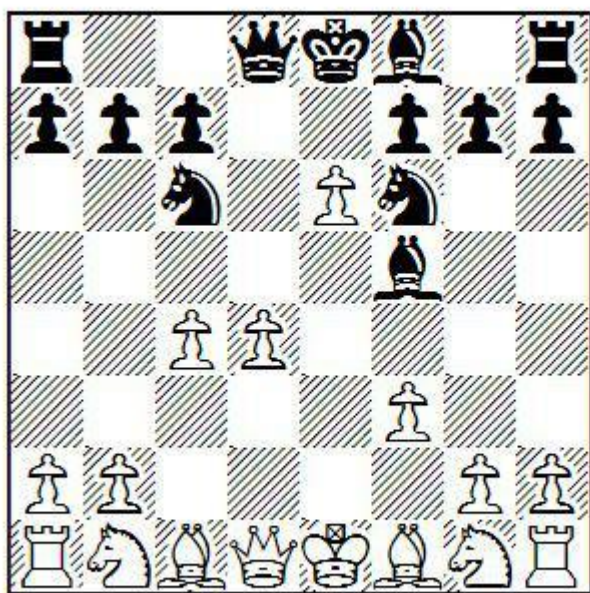


White's army is sitting forlornly on the back rank, while her queen is cut off and vulnerable on a7. Play might continue 11 Qa3 (or 11 Be2 Re8 12 Kf1 d4!) 11 ... Qe7+ 12 Qe3 (or 12 Ne2 Nxc5! 13 Kf2

Bxb1 14 Rxb1 Nce4+ etc) 12 ... Ne5 13 Ne2 Rfe8 14 Kd1 Rb4! with ... d5-d4 to follow.

c) 6 Nc3!? exd5 7 g4! is rare and extremely committal but is in fact a sneaky attempt to transpose to the dangerous Correspondence Refutation. As we will see later, this 'refutation' is far from clear, but Black can favourably avoid the transposition here with 7 ... Be6!. In order to justify her kingside weaknesses, White must press on: 8 g5 Ng8! 9 Qb3, when Black has the dangerous 9 ... dxc4! 10 Qxb7 (10 Bxc4 Bxc4 11 Qxc4 Bd6 favours Black) 10 ... Nd7 and here a handful of correspondence games have continued 11 Qe4 Ne7 12 Bh3 Bxh3 13 Nxh3 Nb6 with chances for both sides (e.g. M.Bandelj-V.Destruels Moreno, correspondence 2008).

6 ... Nc6!



As you might have gathered by now, I am extremely optimistic about Black's chances in the Banker, which is borne out in practice (Black has a fantastic score from the diagram). But let me be very clear about one thing: this position is *not* objectively winning for Black. Although, practically speaking, White faces an extremely difficult job to save the game, Black still needs to play accurately and energetically to fan the flames of her initiative. After all, we are two

pawns down, and likely to sacrifice even more material in the near future.

Having delivered my warning, let me finish by saying that this is certainly one of the most enjoyable lines to play in this entire opening, and many brilliant victories have been recorded with Black giving checkmate in under 25 moves. You certainly do not have to remember all of the analysis that follows, but I highly suggest you play through all of the lines to get a feel for Black's typical attacking themes. Enough chatter; let's get into the fun stuff!

White's main choices are:

A: 7 exf7+?!

B: 7 Be3!

Other moves fail to impress:

a) 7 d5? is a mistake that is seen from time to time, and even occasionally by grandmasters: 7 ... Nb4 8 Na3 (8 Qa4+ b5! 9 Qxb5+ c6 is crushing) 8 ... Bc5! (8 ... fxe6 9 Qa4+ c6!, with a raging initiative, is also very strong, M.Trnovec-Zo.Adam, Zalakaros 2000) 9 Bd2 0-0 10 Qb3 a5! 11 Be2 fxe6 12 dxe6 Re8 13 g4 Bg6 14 Bxb4 axb4 15 Nc2 Rxe6 16 Kf1 Qd2 and White's position had been completely decimated in G.Milos-D.Smerdon, Internet 2015.

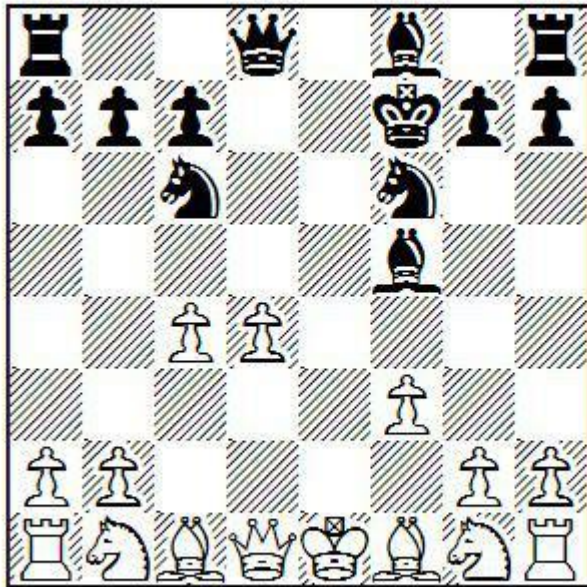
b) 7 Bd3?! Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Qxd4 with a clear advantage to Black, A.Stiri-E.Sperdokli, Greek Women's Championship, Athens 2001.

c) 7 Ne2 Nb4 (7 ... fxe6?! is not in the spirit of our opening: after 8 a3 Qd7 9 Be3 0-0-0 10 Nbc3, White was better in V.Bologan-A.Shirov, Dresden rapid 1997) 8 g4?? (8 Ng3! improves, though Black is still for choice after the standard 8 ... Nc2+ 9 Kf2 Nxd4!) 8 ... Bc2! winning the queen, N.Guliyev-A.Mevel, Avoine 2012.

A: 7 exf7+?!

Points for bravery, but extremely risky. White risks a quick defeat, though she can walk a very thin line of 'only moves' to escape to an endgame in which she is only slightly worse. Hardly an opening success for the first player!

7 ... Kxf7



White has two extra pawns, but every piece sits on its starting square, while the black pieces are itching to be let loose against the white king. Only with 8 Ne2! can White hope to survive the opening.

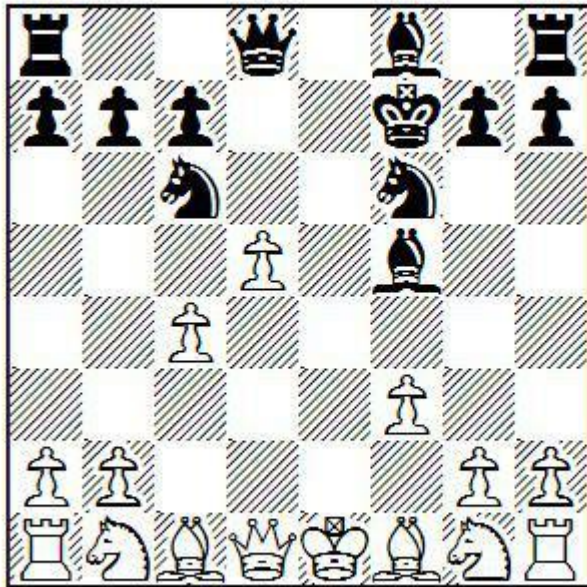
A1: 8 d5?

A2: 8 Be3?

A3: 8 Ne2!

Even worse was 8 Bd3?? Bb4+! when White, one of the Netherlands' top talents, found himself already dead lost. It was only a blitz game, but still, the continuation was brutal: 9 Nc3 Re8+ 10 Ne2 Nxd4 11 Bxf5 Nxe2! 12 Qxd8 Raxd8 13 Kf2 Bc5+ 14 Kf1 Nxc3 15 Bf4 Rd1+ 16 Rxd1 Nxd1 0-1 J.Van Foreest-N.Zwirs, Amsterdam (blitz) 2015.

A1: 8 d5?



8 ... Nb4!

8 ... Bb4+ 9 Kf2? Re8 10 g4? Nxg4+!! 11 fxc4 Qh4+ 12 Kg2 Be4+ 13 Nf3 Qxg4+ 14 Kf2 Bc5+ was the short and sweet game *JIMMYG112* (2300)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013, but 9 Nc3 would have been more tenacious.

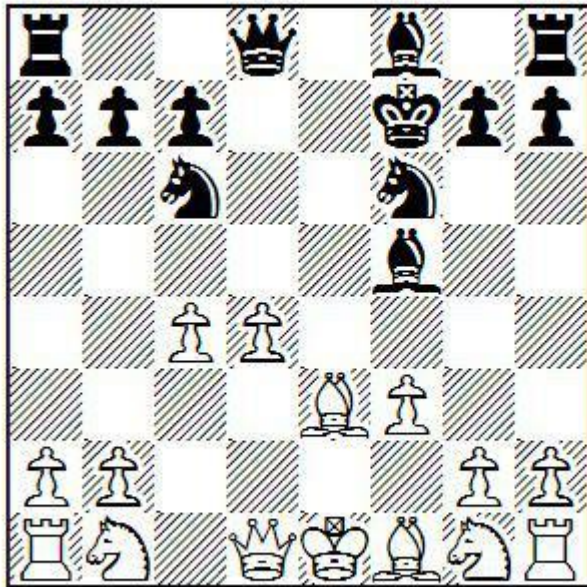
9 Na3 Bc5!

Preparing a deadly rook check on e8, for which there is no antidote. White is lost; e.g.

10 Be2 Re8 11 Kf1 Nh5!

With the introduction of the black queen via h4, White can already resign.

A2: 8 Be3?



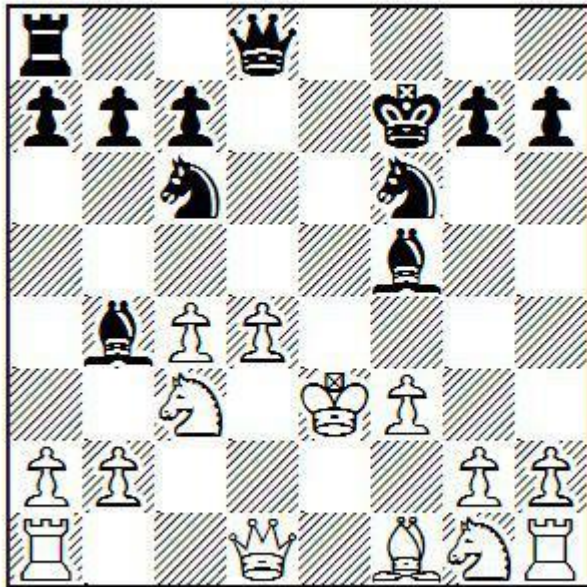
Due to the newly-opened e-file, the development of the bishop no longer offers the defensive chances that it does on move seven. After ...

8 ... Bb4+!

Black is already winning. The key idea to remember is the standard ... Re8xe3 motif, usually followed by a demolition of d4.

9 Kf2

9 Nc3 Re8 10 Kf2 (or 10 Qd2 Qxd4 with a decisive advantage) 10 ... Rxe3! 11 Kxe3



11 ... Bc2!! (11 ... Nxd4 and 11 ... Qe7+ 12 Kf2 Nxd4! are more standard follow-ups to the sacrifice on e3, and also winning, but the text is so much sweeter) 12 Qd2 Ng4+!! 13 fxg4 (or 13 Kf4 Bd6+ 14 Kxg4 Bf5+! 15 Kxf5 Qh4! and mate in two) 13 ... Qg5+ wins the house, 0-1 Ge.Sergeev-D.Saulin, Tula 2005.

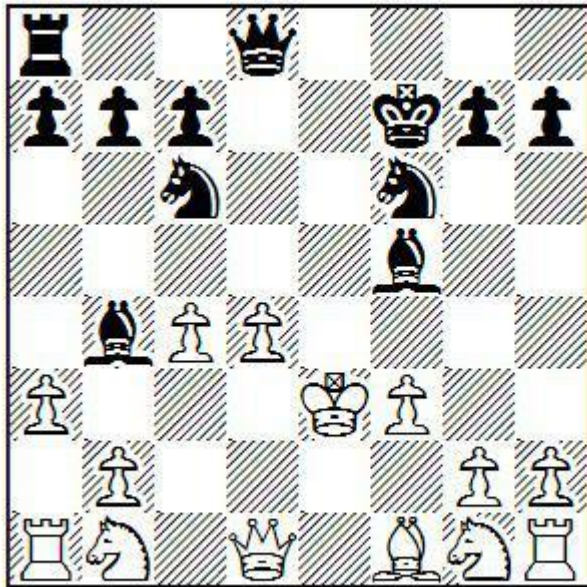
9 ... Re8 10 a3

10 Ne2 Rxe3! (of course!) 11 Kxe3 Qe7+ (11 ... Nxd4 wins as well) 12 Kf2 Re8 13 Qc1 (after 13 Qb3 Bc2! or 13 ... Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Qe1+ 15 Kg1 Bc5, the game is over) 13 ... Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Be1+ 15 Kg1 Qc5 16 Qd1 Bc2 0-1 Vi.Dimitrov-D.Rivera Kuzawka, Lalin 1994.

10 ... Rxe3

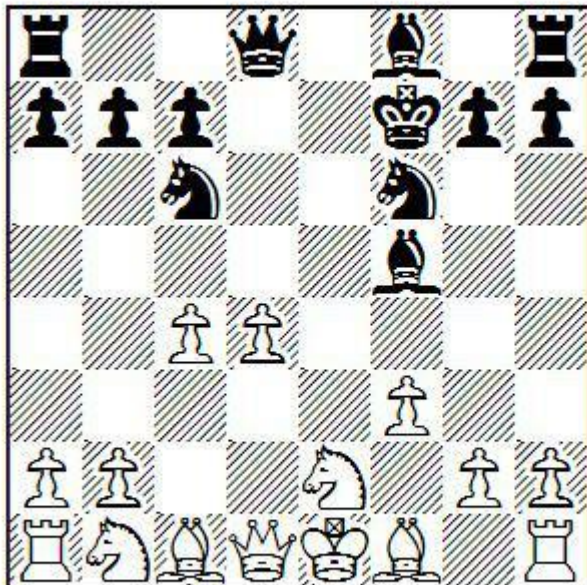
10 ... Bc5 11 Ne2 Rxe3! also wins: 12 Kxe3 Qe7+ 13 Kf2 Rd8 14 g3 Nxd4 15 Kg2 Nxf3 16 Qc1 Ne1+ 0-1 H.Frágola-H.Tortosa, correspondence 2010.

11 Kxe3



This was Game 1 (Onyekwere-Smerdon). Here Black has an instructive choice of pretty winning moves that make use of well-known tactical motifs, including 11 ... Nxd4, 11 ... Bc5, 11 ... Ng4+, 11 ... Bc2 and (surely the most aesthetic) 11 ... Be1!.

A3: 8 Ne2!



The only try to prolong the game.

8 ... Nb4!

The best reply. White must play extremely precisely in order not to lose quickly.

However, in case you forget your theory, you will be happy to know that both 8 ... Bb4+ 9 Nbc3 Qe7, followed by ... Rad8, and 8 ... Bc5!? 9 dxc5 Qe7 10 Kf2 Rhe8, followed by ... Rad8 or ... Ne5, give Black a dangerous attack that will yield at least a draw with best play by White.

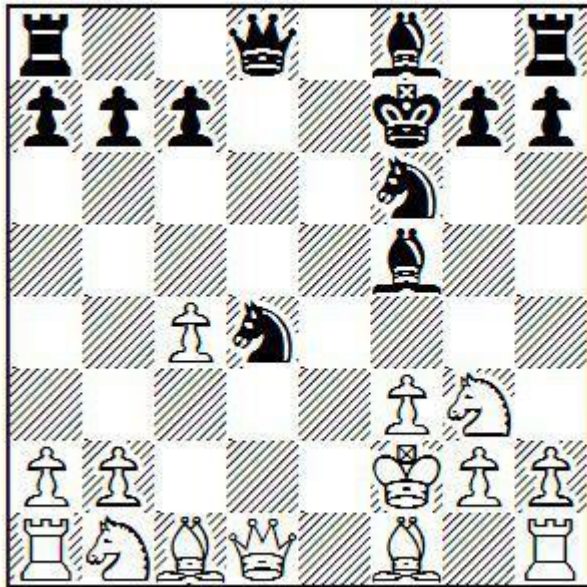
9 Ng3!

Again the only move to avoid disaster. 9 Na3? Nd3+ 10 Kd2 Bb4+ 11 Nc3 Nf2 is utterly devastating; and 9 Kf2? Bc5! is also crushing.

9 ... Nc2+

9 ... Bc2!? 10 Qd2 Bc5! is very dangerous too, but White can reach a pieces vs. queen endgame in which she may hold a draw: 11 dxc5 Re8+ 12 Kf2 (not 12 Be2?? Nd3+ 13 Kf1 Qd4, winning White's queen) 12 ... Nd3+! 13 Bxd3 Qd4+ 14 Qe3! Rxe3 15 Bxe3 Qxd3 16 Na3! with chances to survive (16 Nc3 Re8 17 Rhe1 Qxc4 clearly favours Black).

10 Kf2 Nxd4!



The knight is quite the multitasker.

11 c5!

Another 'only move' – this one is harder to spot; White prepares Bc4+.

Not 11 Be3? Nc2! or 11 Nxf5? Nxf5, followed by ... Bc5+; while 11 Bd3?! Bc5 12 Be3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Re8 14 Re1 g6! (to control f5) 15 Nc3 Rxe3!! 16 Rxe3 Nf5 17 Qxd8 Bxe3+ 18 Ke2 Rxd8 19 Nxf5 Bf4 gives Black a clear endgame advantage.

11 ... Bxc5 12 Be3!

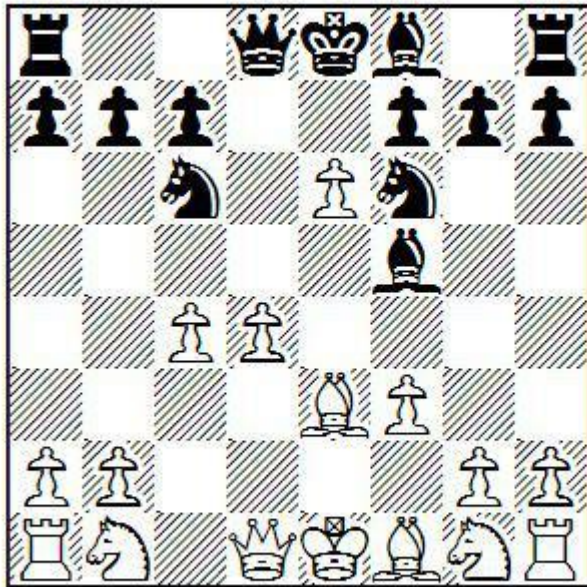
12 Bc4+? loses to 12 ... Be6 13 Bxe6+ Nxe6+ 14 Be3 Bxe3+ 15 Kxe3 Qe7!.

12 ... Qd6 13 Bc4+ Be6 14 Bxe6+ Nxe6 15 Qxd6 Bxd6

Black has a small advantage in the endgame.

B: 7 Be3!

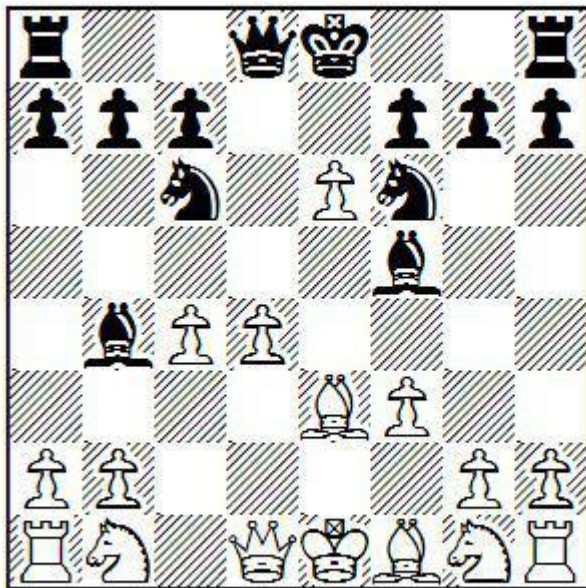
Clearly the best move. Now Black has an important choice. 7 ... Bb4+ is the most popular continuation; however, as compared to the corresponding position after exf7+ Kxf7 8 Be3 Bb4+, here the extra cover on the e-file gives White enough time to get herself out of immediate danger. Instead, Black should immediately turn attention to opening the e-file with 7 ... Qe7!. You can skip straight to this line if you are strictly interested in the theory, though the analysis of 7 ... Bb4+ is in itself quite instructive for the variation, as well as having some historical importance.



B1: 7 ... Bb4+?!

B2: 7 ... Qe7!

B1: 7 ... Bb4+?!



Although this is not the best, it has led to some sparkling black victories and was important for the development of the opening as a

whole.

8 Nd2!

The strongest move. We won't go deeply into the theory, since I am recommending 7 ... Qe7 as our first choice. Black's best reply is somewhat less dynamic than we are used to seeing in this variation.

Others:

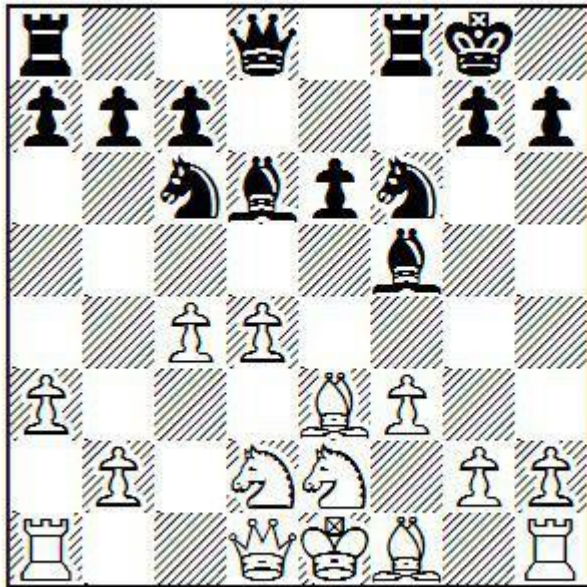
a) 8 Kf2?! fxe6 9 g4?? (9 Ne2 0-0 10 Kg1 e5! gives Black excellent compensation) 9 ... Nxg4+!! 10 Ke2 (or 10 fxg4 Qh4+ 11 Kg2 Be4+ 12 Nf3 0-0 and wins) 10 ... Nxe3 11 Kxe3 e5 led to another great Damaso victory in G.Timoshenko-R.Damaso, European Club Cup, Panormo 2001.

b) 8 Nc3 Qe7 9 d5 (or 9 Bd3 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 0-0-0 11 0-0-0 Ne5! with an attack, R.Nolte-D.Laylo, Philippines Championship, Manila 2008; 9 Qc1! is best) 9 ... 0-0-0 10 Qa4?? (10 Qc1! Bxc3+! 11 Qxc3 Nb4 with good compensation) 10 ... Nxd5!! was the historically significant encounter Wang Zili-R.Damaso, Macao 1996, discussed in our first *Inspirational Game* at the start of this book.

8 ... fxe6

Not 8 ... Nxd4?? 9 Bxd4 Qxd4 10 Qa4+ and White wins a piece; while 8 ... Qe7 9 a3 Qxe6 10 Kf2 gives White just enough time to secure e3 before Black's rooks enter the game.

9 a3 Bd6! 10 Ne2 0-0

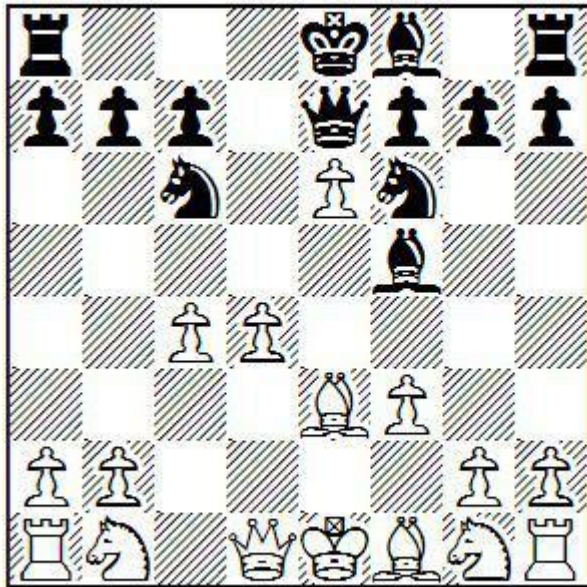


Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn, but no more than that.

B2: 7 ... Qe7!

A strange move, and one worth memorizing. Black invites White once more to capture on f7, while, more importantly, paving the way for queenside castling in response to other moves. Again, it is not necessary to learn by heart the variations that follow: Black's best moves are typically the most natural developing moves in the position; naturally you should always be on the lookout for Black's standard tactical opportunities that frequent the Banker.

Incidentally, 7 ... Nb4!? 8 Na3 Qe7, with similar play, is not bad either.

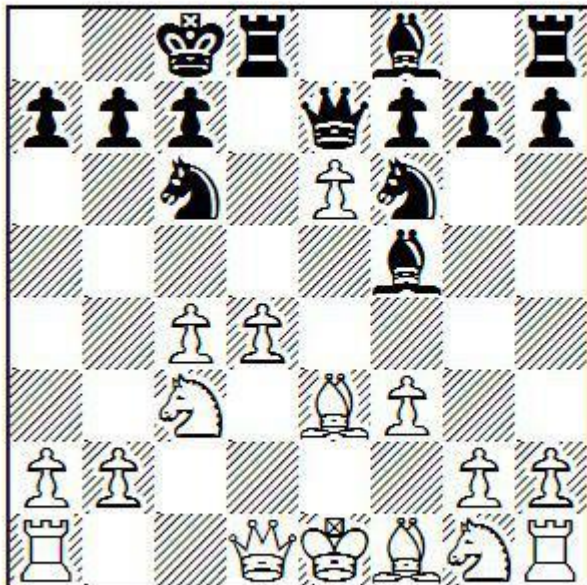


B21: 8 Nc3

B22: 8 exf7+

Instead, 8 d5? is met by the typical 8 ... Nb4, when 9 Qa4+? fails to 9 ... b5! 10 Qxb5+ c6! 11 dxc6 Qxe6! and Black is winning.

B21: 8 Nc3 0-0-0



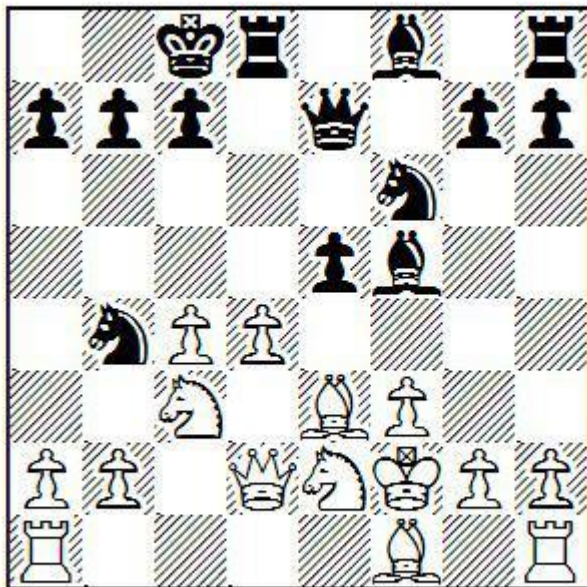
9 Kf2

Again 9 d5? Nb4! is clearly better for Black; while 9 Qd2 fxe6 (9 ... Nb4!? 10 0-0-0 Qxe6 11 Bf2 b5! is also dangerous for White; e.g. 12 cxb5?? Qxa2! and wins) 10 0-0-0 Qb4 11 g4 Bg6 12 h4 Nxd4! 13 Bxd4 e5 gave Black a strong initiative, F.Winiwarter-S.Krivoshey, Oberwart 2000.

9 ... fxe6 10 Nge2

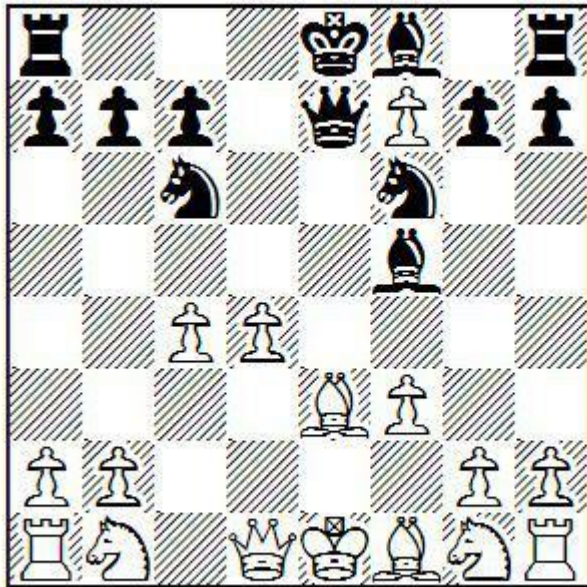
D.Kryakvin-O.Sponheim, Pardubice 2007; and now the most brutal and effective way to continue the attack is with ...

10 ... Nb4 11 Qd2 e5!



... after which White's position is under tremendous pressure.

B22: 8 exf7+



8 ... Kxf7

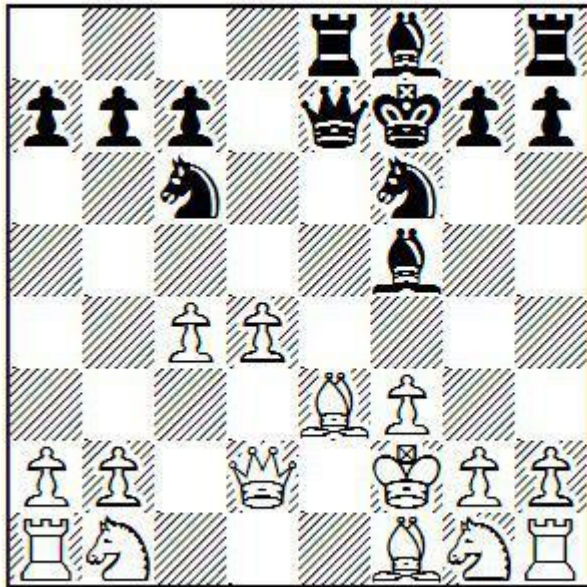
There is nothing wrong with 8 ... Qxf7, but I prefer the text.

9 Kf2

9 Qd2 Re8 10 Kf2 transposes to the main line. Not 9 Qe2?? Re8 10 Kf2 Nb4 and wins.

9 ... Re8 10 Qd2

10 Qc1 should also be met by 10 ... Qd7.



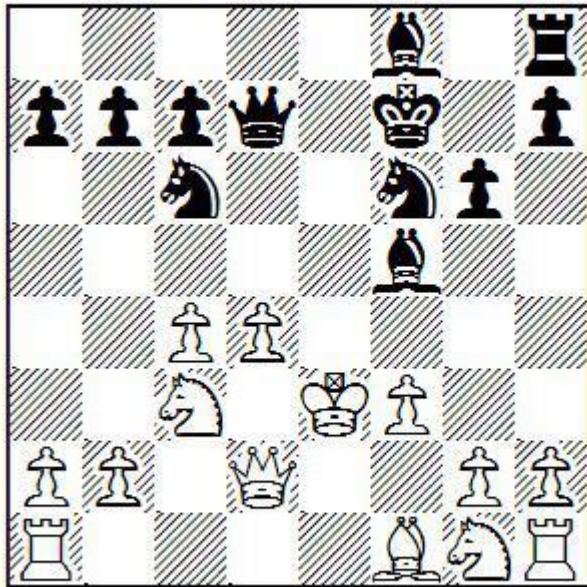
We have reached the end of a fairly natural sequence of moves by both sides, although this position is rare according to my database. White has avoided falling into any of the major traps, but she is not out of the woods yet! The next move is an important one to remember.

10 ... Qd7!

Eyeing up d4 while unleashing the unstoppable threat of ... Rxe3. If you are confident in your tactical abilities, then this is probably a good point to stop memorizing the theory. Black will soon detonate White's structures on e3 and d4, smashing open the white king's defences. What follows is a detailed analysis of this position, but, as the diagram is rarely encountered in practice, I would advise treating the following lines as instructive themes rather than material to be rote-learned.

11 c5!

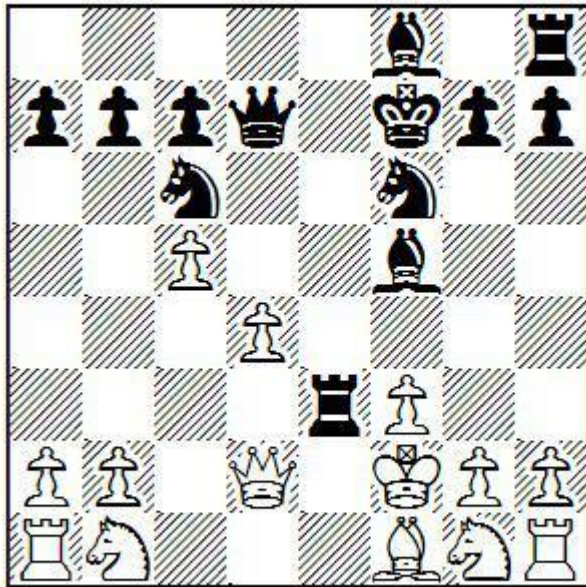
11 Nc3 Rxe3! 12 Kxe3? (here 12 Qxe3! Nxd4 13 Rd1! Bc5 14 Nb5! is an accurate sequence that keeps White in the game; after 14 ... Nxb5 15 Rxd7+ Nxd7 16 cxb5 Bxe3+ 17 Kxe3, White is over the worst, although Black clearly has sufficient compensation for the pawn in this ending) 12 ... Bc5 was Game 2 (Dworakowski-Moll), but 12 ... g6! is an improvement.



The threat of ... Bh6+ forces White to retreat her king, after which ... Nxd4 blasts open the centre. Black is clearly better. Play might continue 13 Kf2 Nxd4 14 g3 Bc5 15 Kg2 Nc2! 16 Qxd7+ Bxd7, when ... Ne3+ is coming with deadly force.

The text is an excellent novelty for White. I have seen it published on a chess web forum, so we cannot assume it will stay unplayed forever. Nevertheless, Black's position is still packed with attacking potential, and our immediate response should be obvious by now ...

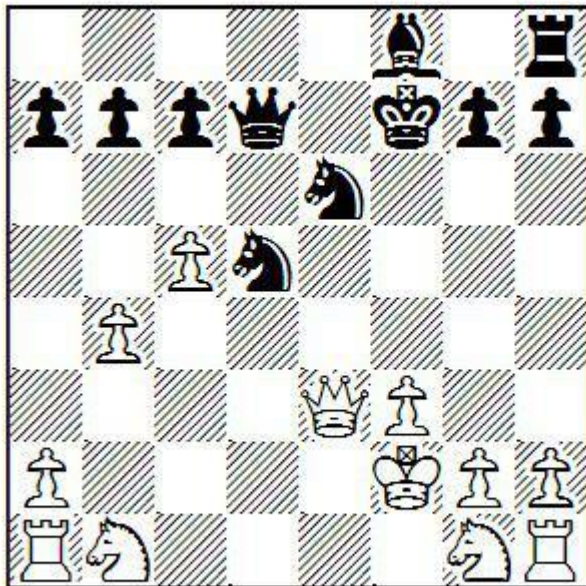
11 ... Rxe3!



12 Qxe3

12 Kxe3 g6! is again strong; for example, 13 Bc4+ Ke8 14 Kf2 Nxd4 15 Na3 Bxc5 16 Kf1 Rf8! with a persistent attack.

12 ... Nxd4 13 Bc4+ Be6! 14 Bxe6+ Nxe6 15 b4 Nd5

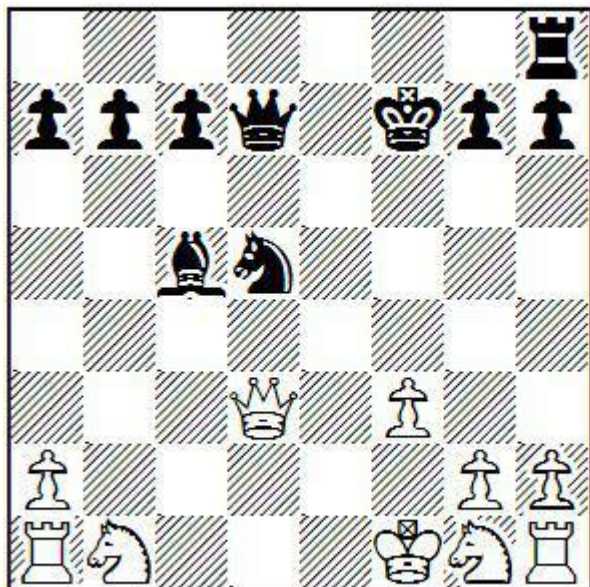


16 Qd3!

The only move. 16 Qe5? Nxc5! or 16 Qe4? Nxc5! wins immediately; while 16 Qd2?! Qc6! threatens ... Nxb4. Black has a clear advantage.

16 ... Nxc5! 17 bxc5 Bxc5+ 18 Kf1

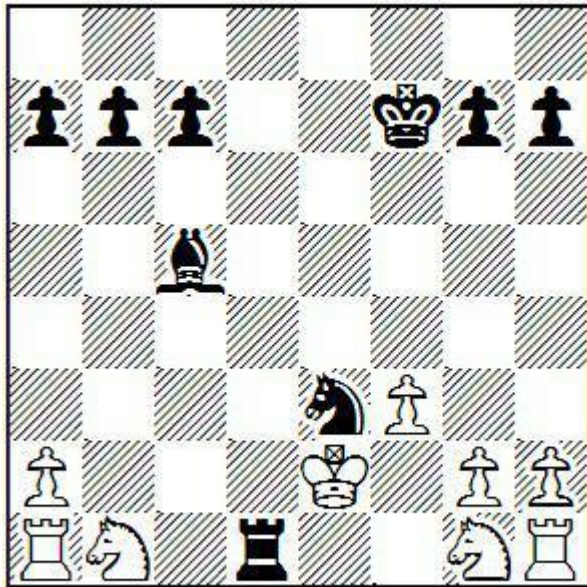
Again forced. 18 Ke1? Qe6+ 19 Ne2 Rd8 is hopeless for White, and 18 Kg3?? Qd6+ mates quickly.



An important position for the evaluation of this line, even if the chances of you facing it over the board are miniscule. What is sure is that Black has at least a draw. The analysis that follows gives some good examples of how the black attack can continue to rage long into the middlegame and even the endgame. White's problems of underdevelopment and king safety are remarkably persistent, despite being a rook ahead.

18 ... Re8!

There are some truly fantastic variations after 18 ... Ne3+ 19 Ke2 Qxd3+ 20 Kxd3 Rd8+ 21 Ke2 Rd1!, reaching an incredible position in which Black, a whole rook behind, completely dominates the white army.

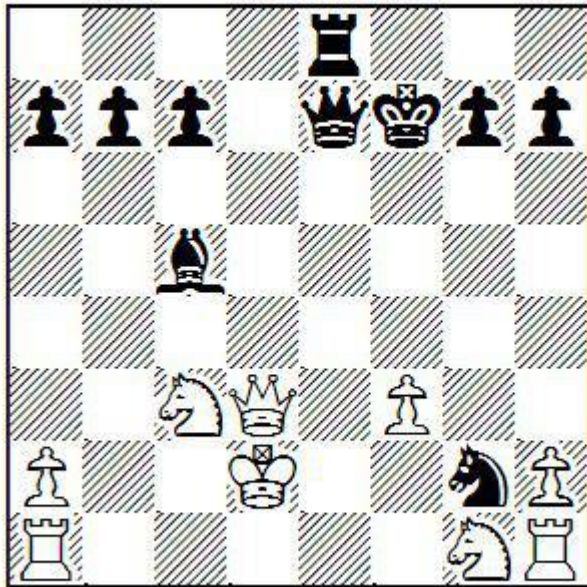


Black, who can force a draw at will, is very close to winning in this complex ending, but the clarity of her advantage after 18 ... Re8 means that I am recommending that move instead. Just for entertainment, let's look at one plausible continuation by letting the computer play White: 22 a4 Bd4! 23 Ra3 Rxb1 24 Rxe3 Bxe3 25 Kxe3 a5!! 26 Kd2 c6 27 Kc2 Rf1 28 h4 b5 29 axb5 cxb5 30 g4 a4 31 Kc3 Ke6 32 Kb4 Rb1+ 33 Ka3 Kd5 and Black wins.

19 Nc3!

Both 19 Qc4 Qe6 and 19 Qb3 Kf8 free the black knight to infiltrate lethally at e3.

19 ... Ne3+ 20 Ke2 Nxc2+ 21 Kd2 Qe7!



White's king is fatally caught out in the open, and all lines lead to a quick black victory. For example, 22 Qc4+ Kf8 23 Nge2 Rd8+ 24 Kc1 Ba3+ 25 Kb1 Ne3 26 Qb3 Rd2 27 Nc1 b5! 28 Qxb5 Qe5! and wins.

Chapter Two

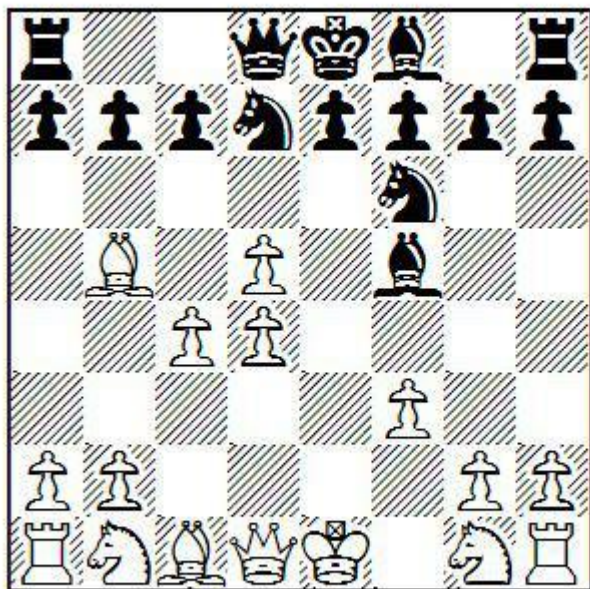
The Jadoul

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3

This is the most common route to the Jadoul. In fact, 4 Bb5+ is White's best-performing move, though only the fourth most popular. In my opinion, 4 Bb5+ is practically superior to 4 f3, if only because sidelines with ... c7-c6 ('the Elbow') work a lot better when White is committed to f2-f3. However, we will stick with the move-order that is statistically most likely to lead us to the exciting and popular Jadoul variation.

4 ... Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 c4



Black has two possibilities here, coinciding with the standard pawn breaks. My main recommendation is 6 ... e6, which is the choice of most of the strong players who have wielded this opening. However, I have found a few new ideas after the alternative 6 ... a6!? that

renders it an interesting surprise weapon. We will take a brief look at that option at the end.

This is a big chapter, with a daunting number of variations. Don't let this put you off; in fact, the large number of lines is mainly due to the extra possibilities I have presented for Black (not White). Should you wish, you can simply choose to focus on your preferred options for Black (particularly on move nine in the main line) and ignore the rest. Nevertheless, I would suggest having a look through the other variations anyway, as there are several common ideas and themes across the branches. But before we delve into the theory, let's first sample some appetizing practical examples.

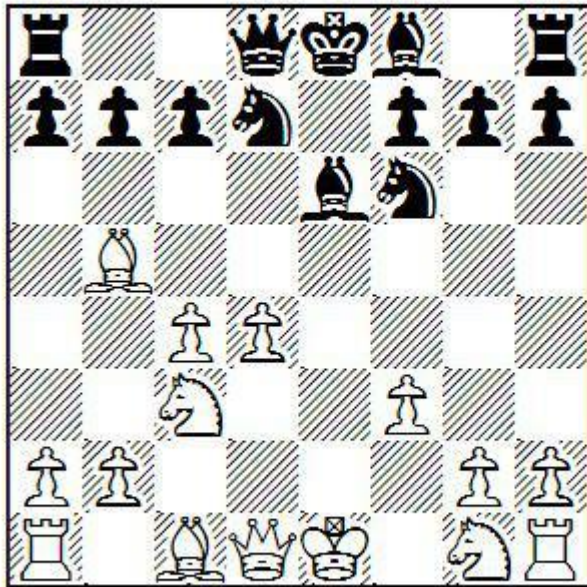
Game 3

M.Paragua-D.Smerdon

World Junior Championships, Kochin 2004

This game was my first classical victory over a grandmaster using 3 ... Bg4. Several more were to follow, but in recent years I have generally preferred not to play this opening against players over 2500. This is not because of any particular fear or doubt – of late I have decided to concentrate my theoretical energies into finding new ideas in other openings, and I would rather use up my hard-earned novelties against the big fish!

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 c4 e6 7 dxe6 Bxe6 8 Nc3

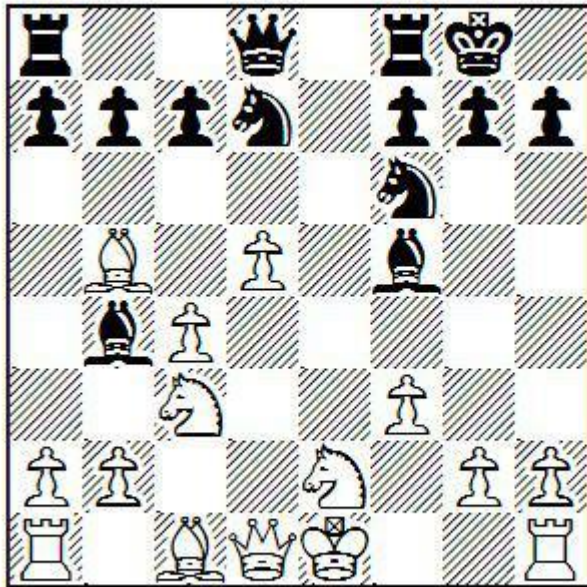


Usually this move-order is an attempt to avoid 8 d5 Bf5 9 Nc3 Bc5.

8 ... Bb4

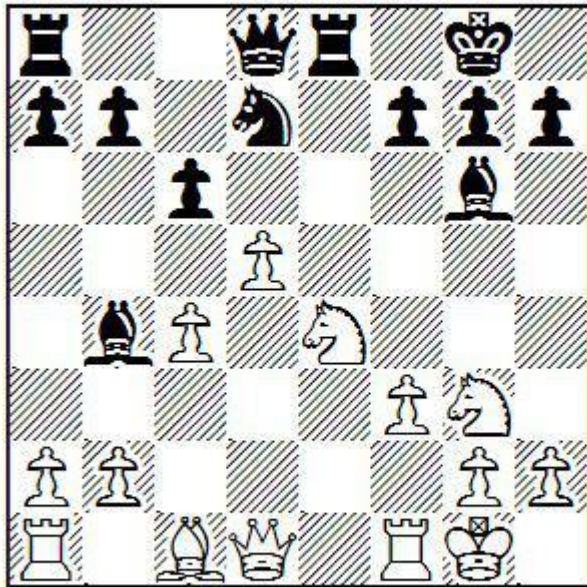
In this game I was happy to transpose back into 9 ... Bb4 lines, but you should note that if you prefer one of Black's other ninth-move alternatives (and in the theory section I've presented four!), then 8 ... c6!? is completely fine. For example, 9 d5 Bxd5! 10 cxd5 cxb5 11 d6 (11 Nxb5? Bc5! traps White's king in the centre, giving Black a raging attack) 11 ... Nc5 12 Qe2+ Ne6 13 Qxb5+ Qd7 with equality.

9 d5 Bf5 10 Ne2 0-0



11 0-0?!

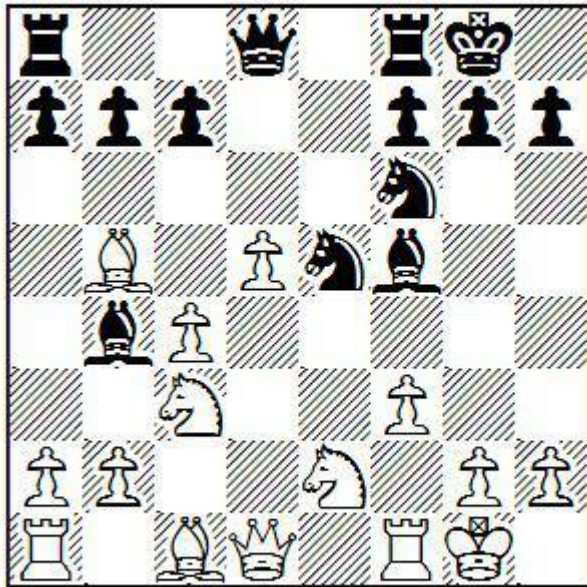
11 Bxd7! is very important; White cannot allow the bishop on b5 to be left stranded on the queenside. Black should respond with 11 ... Nxd7!, directing the remaining knight towards the e5-and c5-squares and releasing the d8-h4 diagonal for the black queen. The main line continues 12 0-0 Re8 (intending ... Ne5) 13 Ng3 Bg6 14 Nce4 and now 14 ... c6! is a nice novelty.



Black seems to have compensation in all lines, while 15 dxc6? (15 Kh1 f5!?) 15 ... Qb6+! 16 Kh1 Qxc6 is already a little better for Black. See the theory section for further elaboration.

11 ... Ne5

11 ... c6!? is interesting too. Note that the pawn is indirectly protected by a queen check on b6. Play might continue 12 dxc6 (or 12 Ba4 cxd5 13 cxd5 Rc8 with a certain amount of play for the pawn) 12 ... bxc6 13 Ba4 Qb6+ 14 Kh1 Ne5 with dangerous compensation, M.Jordan Arenas-V.Andres Julia, Mislata 2003.



12 Ng3

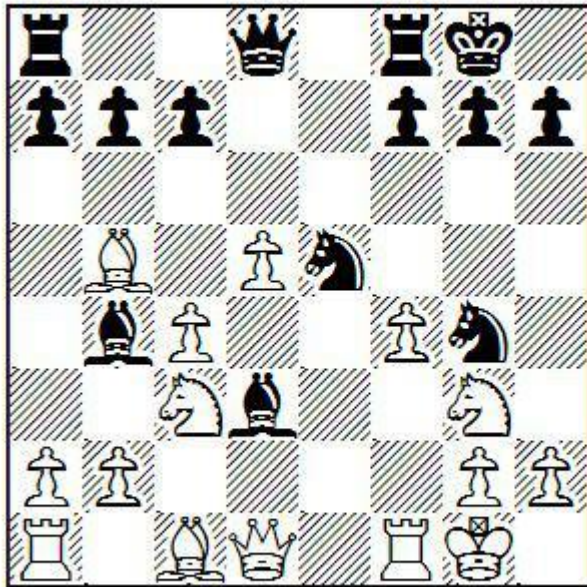
After 12 Nd4 Bg6! 13 f4 Bh5! 14 Qd2 Ned7, White's play has only succeeded in giving Black access to several important squares, such as e4 and g4, and control over the h5-d1 diagonal. For example, 15 a3 Ne4 16 Qc2 Bxc3 17 bxc3 Ndc5 with excellent compensation; White's structure is a mess and Black's knights are having a field day. (I dearly wanted to make 14 ... Neg4!? work, but alas, it wasn't to be: 15 h3 c6 16 Ba4 Bc5 17 b4! Bxb4 18 hxg4 Ne4 19 Qd3 Bxc3 20 gxh5 Bxa1 21 Qxe4 Re8 22 Ne6! fxe6 23 dxc6 Qd4+ 24 Qxd4 Bxd4+ 25 Kh2 and White is clearly better in this endgame.)

12 ... Bd3 13 f4?!

Inviting the black pieces to run riot!

13 Re1 was best, whereupon the game reaches a sharp opposite-coloured bishops middlegame: 13 ... Bxc4 14 Rxe5 Bxc3 15 bxc3 Bxb5 and now best play by both sides quickly simplifies the position: 16 Bg5 h6 17 Bh4 Qd6! 18 Qd4 Rfe8 19 Rxe8+ Nxe8 20 c4 c5! 21 Qc3 Qf4 22 cxb5 Qxh4 23 Qxc5 b6 24 Qe3 Qc4 and a level endgame is reached.

13 ... Nfg4!!



Suddenly, the black pieces spring to life. White is already on the brink of disaster.

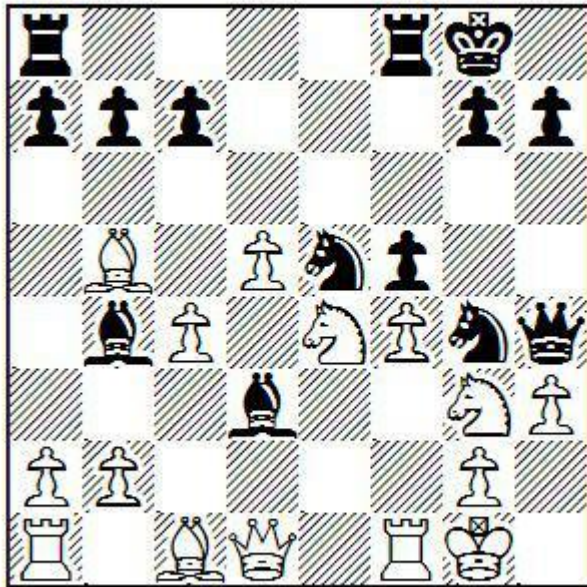
14 Nce4?

White had to try and bail out with 14 fxe5, but it doesn't come cheaply: 14 ... Bc5+ 15 Kh1 Qh4 16 h3 Qxg3 17 Qxg4 Qxg4 18 hxg4 Bxf1 19 Bf4 a6! 20 Bxa6 Rxa6 21 Rxf1 Bb4! and Black is better.

14 Nge2? is met by 14 ... Bc5+ 15 Kh1 Nxh2!! 16 fxe5 Bxe2 17 Qxe2 Nxf1 18 Qe1! f5! with a clear advantage to Black.

14 ... Qh4 15 h3 Bc5+?!

Natural, but not the most clinical. Instead, 15 ... f5!! was a brilliant means of continuing the attack.



White is lost: 16 fxe5 Bxe4! 17 Nxe4 fxe4 18 Bf4 Bc5+ 19 Kh1 Nf2+ 20 Rxf2 Qxf2 followed by ... e4-e3 etc.

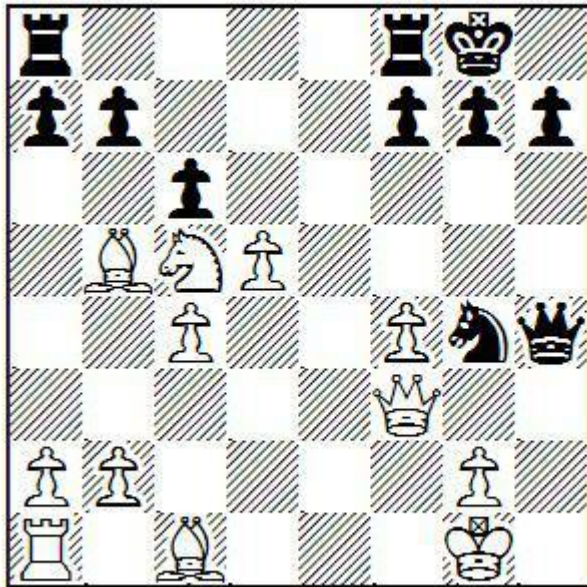
16 Nxc5 Qxg3 17 hxg4 Bxf1 18 Qxf1

Or 18 Kxf1 Nxg4 19 Ne4 Qh4! with an unstoppable attack.

18 ... Nxg4

Materially, White is doing well. Unfortunately, the king's defences have been ripped apart, and the arrival of a black rook on the e-file will soon spell the end for the white monarch.

19 Qf3 Qe1+ 20 Qf1 Qg3 21 Qf3 Qe1+ 22 Qf1 Qh4 23 Qf3 c6!



Temporarily blocking the bishop's control of e8.

24 g3

24 dxc6 Rae8 is curtains.

24 ... Qh2+ 25 Kf1 Rae8 26 Ne6

26 Qxg4 Qh1+ 27 Kf2 Re1 forces White to give up the queen to stop checkmate.

26 ... cxb5 27 Qxg4 fxe6 28 d6 bxc4 29 Be3 Qh1+ 30 Bg1 e5 31 d7 Rd8 32 Re1 exf4 33 gxf4 h5! 0-1

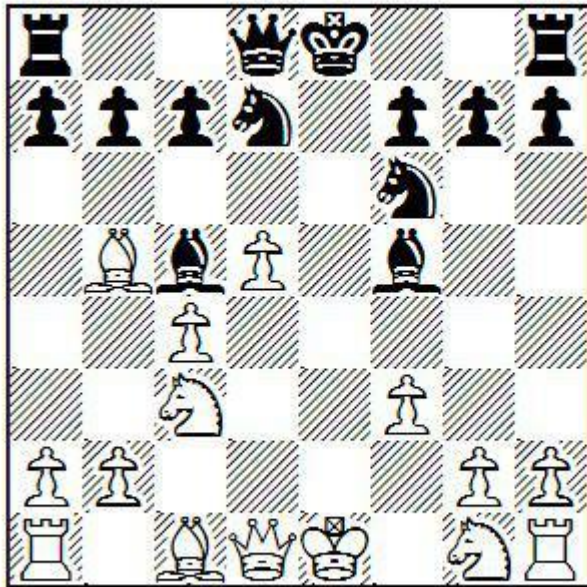
Game 4

Le.Vajda-S.Krivoshey

Budapest 2000

Sergei Krivoshey is not a name many chess players are familiar with, although the Ukrainian GM has amassed an impressive array of scalps with his unorthodox play. Perhaps no other grandmaster has contributed as much to the theory of our opening over the past fifteen years. This game, one of Krivoshey's early efforts, neatly encompasses his uncompromisingly entertaining style.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 c4 e6 7 dxe6 Bxe6 8 d5 Bf5 9 Nc3 Bc5



A very popular and high-scoring move. Black's bishop immediately targets White's weakened kingside dark squares.

10 Qe2+

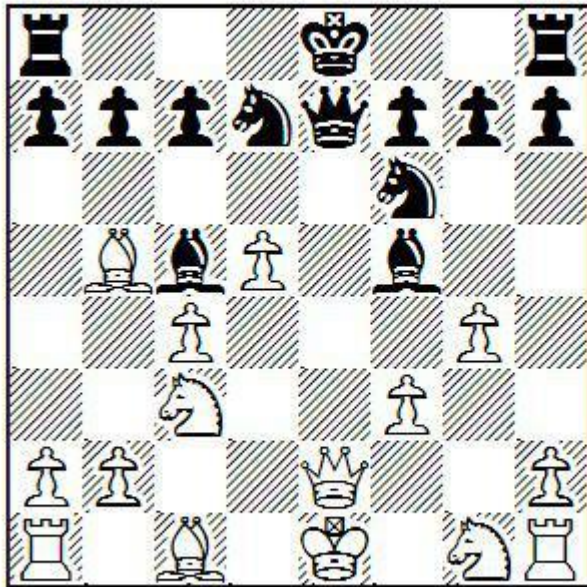
The only move to try for an advantage. 10 Nge2? 0-0 is just horrible for White.

10 ... Qe7

10 ... Kf8!? is interesting, although Black shouldn't really be afraid of the queen exchange as her activity remains immense. After 11 Be3! Qe7 (11 ... Kg8!? is an interesting new idea; see the theory) 12 Bxd7 (12 Bf4 a6 is fine for Black) 12 ... Nxd7 13 Bxc5 Qxc5 14 Qf2! Qxc4 15 Nge2 Qc5!, White has a slight, but manageable edge.

11 g4!?

11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 is more common; for example, 12 Bf4 a6! 13 Ba4 Nb6! 14 Bb3 Bd3! 15 Bxc7 Rac8! 16 Bxb6 Bxb6 with excellent compensation for the pawns.



11 ... Bg6

11 ... Bd3 (as in O.Renet-L.Galego, European Club Cup, Eupen 1994) is more to the point, and if 12 Qxe7+ Kxe7 13 Bf4 then 13 ... a6! with sufficient compensation.

12 Bg5 0-0-0 13 Qxe7 Bxe7 14 Bxd7+

Otherwise ... Nc5 may be embarrassing for the b5-bishop.

14 ... Rxd7

A typical sort of endgame for the 9 ... Bc5 variation. Black has secured the two bishops and has excellent open lines for the pieces to enjoy. Meanwhile, White's centre is far weaker than it appears, with c4 being a particularly tender spot. The shot ... h7-h5 is in the air, while Black's knight can also find activity on the queenside via d7-c5/e5. Black's compensation is undoubtedly enough for the pawn.

15 0-0-0 Re8

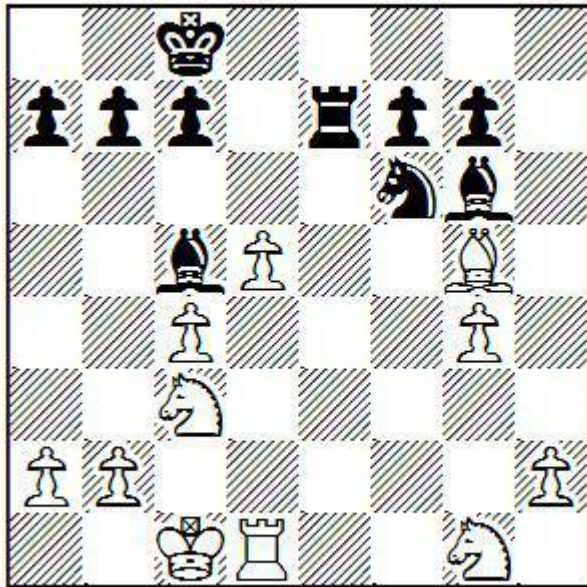
15 ... h5! immediately was strong.

16 Nh3 h5! 17 Rhg1 hxg4 18 fxg4 Bc5!

The bishop pair cut through the board like two dark lasers, while the open e-file is for Black's rooks alone to enjoy.

19 Rge1 Rde7 20 Rxe7 Rxe7 21 Ng1?

The shamefully passive 21 Rh1 was best, after which White can put up stubborn resistance.



21 ... Re5! 22 Bf4

Or 22 Bxf6 Be3+!.

22 ... Nxg4! 23 b4 Rf5!

Without even a pawn any more to compensate for the positional defects, White is busted.

24 Nge2 Rxf4! 25 Nxf4 Be3+ 26 Kb2 Bxf4 27 Rd4 Ne5! 28 Kb3 Bxh2

Black has an overwhelming material advantage, to which White quickly succumbs.

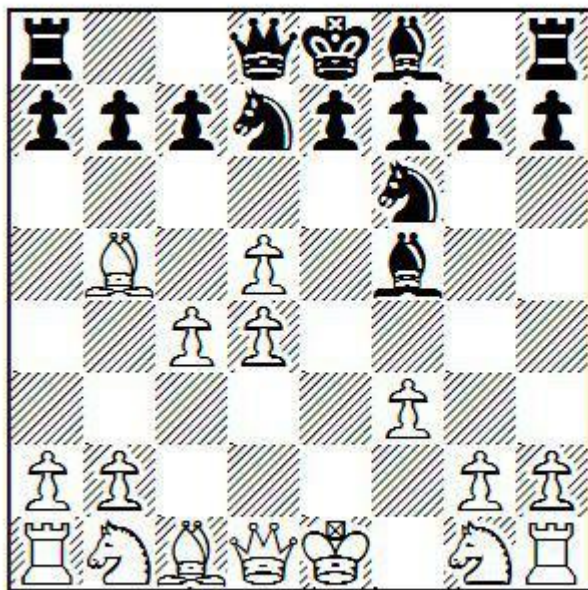
29 Rh4 Nf3 30 Rh8+ Kd7 31 Na4 b6 0-1



GM Sergei Krivoshey – a modern-day 3 ... Bg4 hero

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 c4

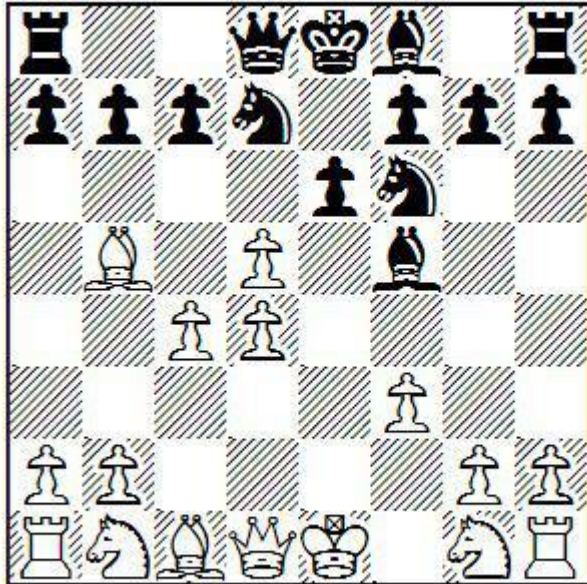


Now Black can choose between:

A: 6 ... e6

B: 6 ... a6!?

A: 6 ... e6



This central break, a standard theme in our system, suggests itself. Black challenges the white pawn phalanx, while at the same time releasing her king's bishop and opening a potential path for the queen to h4.

7 dxe6

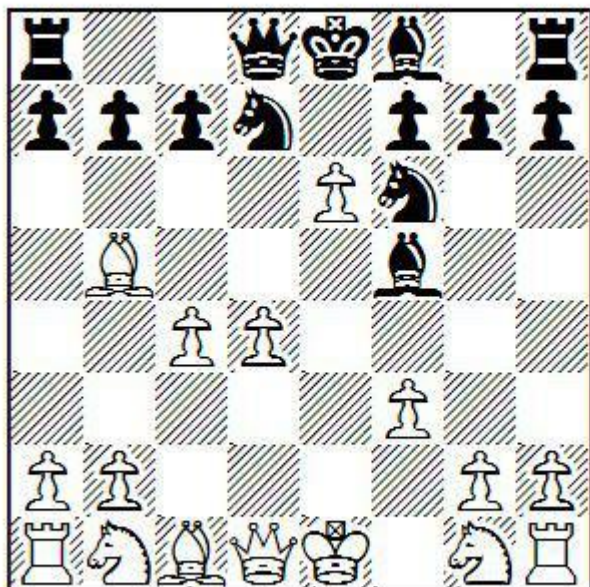
Instead:

a) 7 Nc3 exd5 8 c5 c6 9 Bd3 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 b6! is comfortably better for Black, Ya.Zinchenko-I.Smirnov, Odessa 2007.

b) 7 g4 Bg6! (I prefer this natural retreat, after which White must be careful) 8 dxe6 fxe6 9 Ne2 c6! 10 Ba4 was K.Movsziszian-V.Sanchez Alarcos Galian, La Roda 2009, and now Black has the tremendous novelty 10 ... Nxg4!!, when the knight is poisoned: 11 fxe4? Qh4+ 12 Ng3 (12 Kd2? Bb4+ 13 Nbc3 Ne5!! wins, and 12 Kf1? Bd6! is resignable) 12 ... Bd6! 13 Qf3 Rf8 14 Qe3 0-0-0 with a decisive attack; ... e6-e5 will be crushing when it arrives.

There is also the safe option, 7 ... Bxb1 8 Rxb1 Bb4+, but then why did we play 3 ... Bg4 in the first place? 9 Bd2 (9 Kf2 0-0 certainly

gives Black compensation) 9 ... Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 exd5 11 Qe3+ ½-½ was the short end to H.Jadenkus-K.Fee, correspondence 2005.

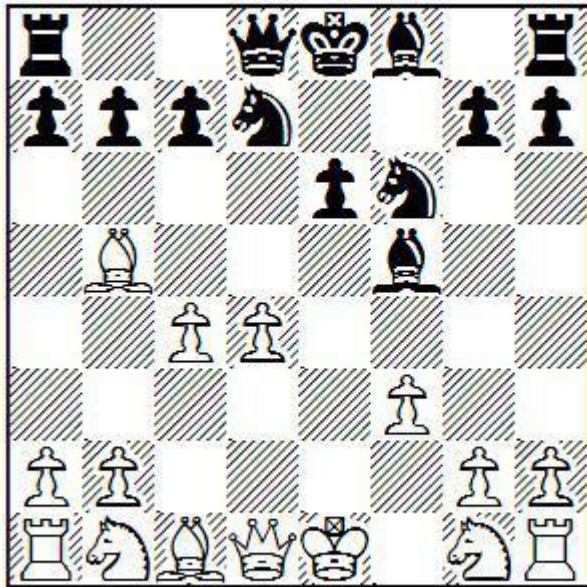


From the diagram, Black almost always chooses to keep the e-file clear with 7 ... Bxe6. However, 7 ... fxe6!? is not as timid as it might first appear, and was the consistent choice of the strong correspondence player Patrick Spitz. We will briefly consider this option before moving on to the main lines.

A1: 7 ... fxe6!?

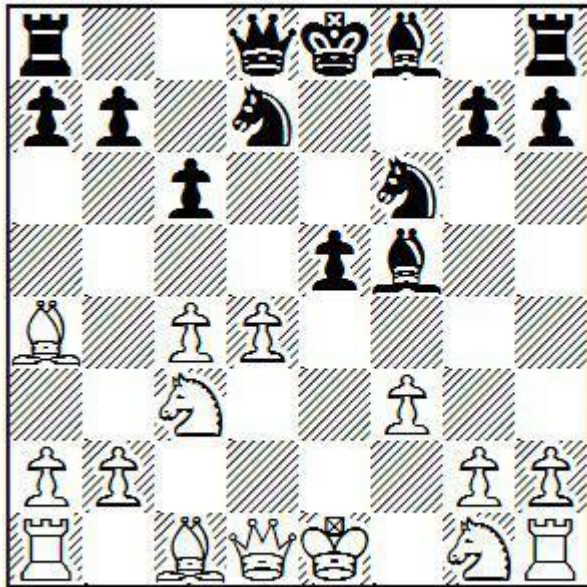
A2: 7 ... Bxe6

A1: 7 ... fxe6!?



In a sense, 7 ... fxe6 is a more 'mature' Jadoul, playing for positional compensation based on White's somewhat weak central pawns and lagging development, rather than any immediate attacking ambitions. There is virtually no theory on this variation, so studying what follows should hold you in good stead to surprise and out-prepare your opponent.

8 Nc3 c6 9 Ba4 e5!



A key concept. Black challenges the white centre and seeks to rid herself of her own pawn weakness. In particular, Black would have excellent access to the c5-square for her minor pieces if White's pawn on d4 is forced into a decision.

10 Nge2 Qc7 11 Be3 0-0-0 12 Bc2

Alternatively:

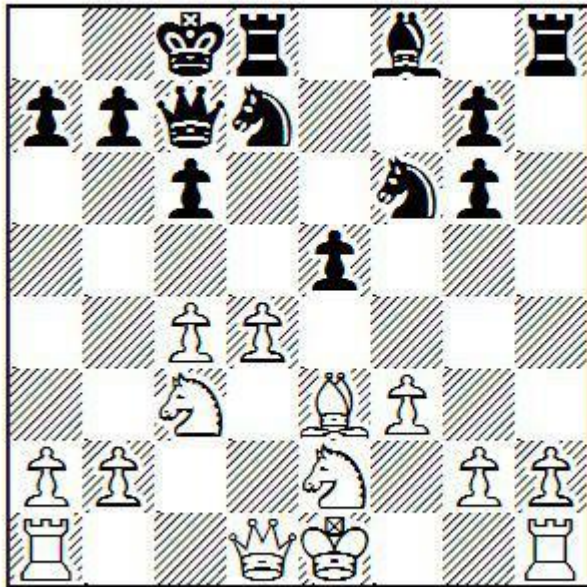
a) 12 d5 Bc5! 13 Qd2 Qb6! demonstrates how Black can, to paraphrase *Star Wars*, feel the power of the dark squares. Perhaps you have to imagine that sentence being read in a raspy Darth Vader voice. I digress. After 14 Bxc5 Nxc5 15 Bc2 Bxc2 16 Qxc2 e4!, Black has excellent play; for example, 17 Nxe4 Ncxe4 18 fxe4 Qe3! 19 Rf1 Rhe8 20 dxc6 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ A.Soltau-P.Spitz, World Correspondence Championship 2003/06.

b) 12 0-0 Nb6 13 Qb3 exd4 14 Nxd4 Qe5! gives Black sufficient compensation on the basis of White's discoordinated forces and weakened dark squares.

12 ... Bg6! 13 Bxg6

13 0-0 Nb6! favours Black.

13 ... hxg6



This is again the sort of position where most engines will underappreciate the hidden dynamism behind Black's game. In particular, White can attempt to hold on to her centre or get her king safe, but she can hardly do both. The game might continue:

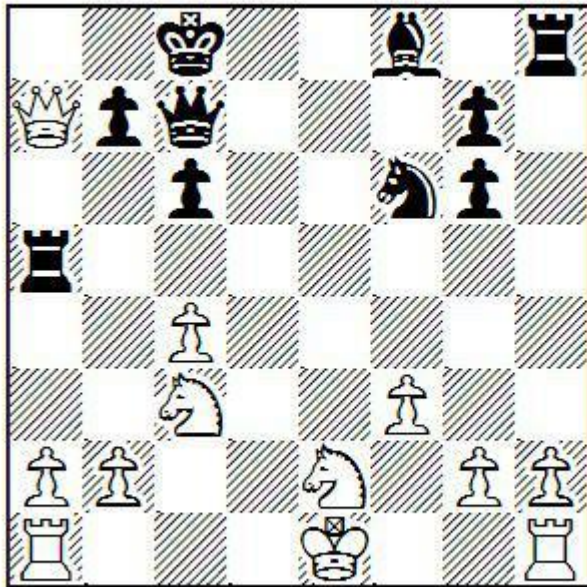
14 Qd3

Or 14 d5 cxd5 15 cxd5 Bc5! with excellent compensation; White's dark squares will soon feel rather naked.

14 ... exd4!?

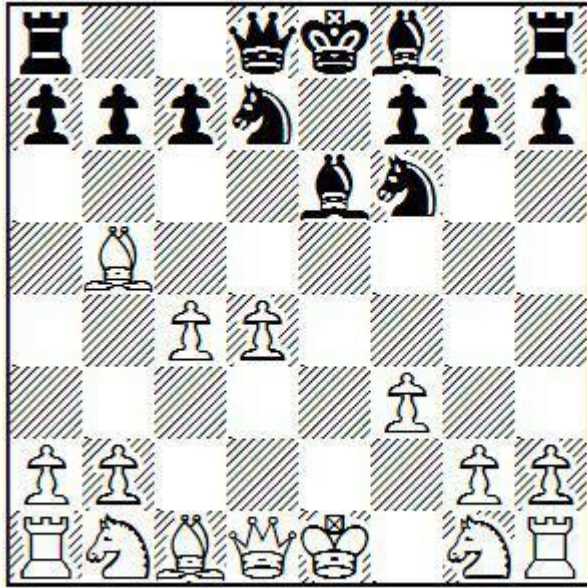
14 ... Nb6 15 d5 allows 15 ... cxd5 16 Bxb6 Qxb6 17 cxd5 Qxb2! 18 Rb1 Qa3 19 Qxg6 Qc5! with dangerous compensation. Instead, 15 0-0-0 is very brave. I had fun analysing the following crazy variation (which, incidentally, is the computer's main line): 15 ... exd4 (15 ... Bc5!?) 16 Bxd4 c5! 17 Nb5! Qb8 18 Qa3 cxd4 19 Nxa7+ Kd7! 20 Qa5 Qc7! 21 Rxd4+ Ke8 22 Nb5 Qc6 23 Rxd8+ Kxd8 with chances for both sides.

15 Bxd4 Ne5! 16 Qe3 Re8 17 Bxe5 Rxe5 18 Qxa7 Ra5!



A complicated double-pawn sac where Black's compensation again revolves around exploiting the dark squares. White's king is likely to seek shelter on the queenside, but Black has good chances to launch an attack from any angle. A sharp, complex struggle awaits.

A2: 7 ... Bxe6



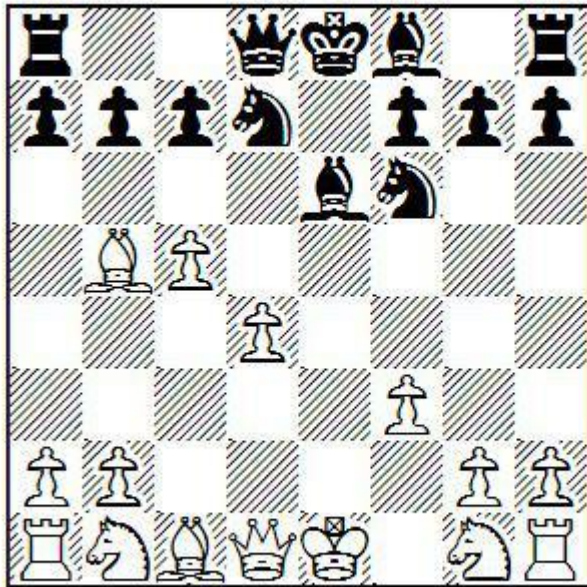
Here, 'every man and his dog' plays 8 d5, but the two other options aren't so bad:

A21: 8 c5!?

A22: 8 Nc3

A23: 8 d5

A21: 8 c5!?



A respectable alternative that perhaps deserves to be played more often. White safeguards the c-pawn and opens up an extra retreat for her bishop. Black can, and should, now make use of the d5-square.

8 ... c6 9 Ba4

9 Bd3 is weaker: 9 ... Nd5 (9 ... b6 10 cxb6 Qxb6 11 Ne2 c5! 12 0-0 cxd4 13 Nf4 Bd6 14 Na3 Bxa3 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 bxa3 0-0 was equal in M.Chandler-L.Galego, Santo Antonio 2001) 10 Ne2 Qh4+! 11 g3 Qh3 12 Nbc3 Qg2 13 Rf1 was M.Womacka-S.Krivoshey, Internet (blitz) 2006, and now 13 ... Nb4! gives Black the initiative.

9 ... Nd5

9 ... Nh5? 10 Ne2! is clearly better for White.

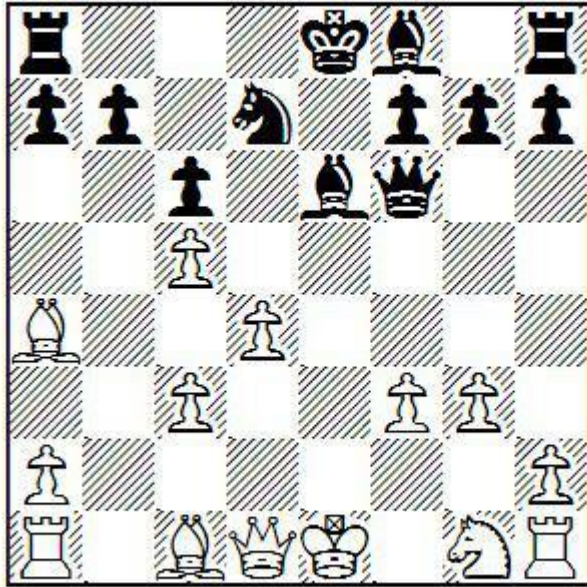
10 Nc3!

Not now 10 Ne2?! Qh4+! 11 g3 Qh3 12 Kf2 due to 12 ... Nxc5! 13 Nbc3! (13 dxc5?? Bxc5+ 14 Ke1 Qg2 15 Rf1 Bh3 wins, and 13 Ng1? Qh5! 14 dxc5 Bxc5+ 15 Kg2 0-0-0 is a winning attack, G.Harutjunyan-Y.Boidman, Neustadt an der Weinstrasse 2012) 13 ... Nxc3! 14 bxc3 Nxa4 15 Qxa4 Bd6 and Black is better.

10 ... Nxc3 11 bxc3 Qh4+

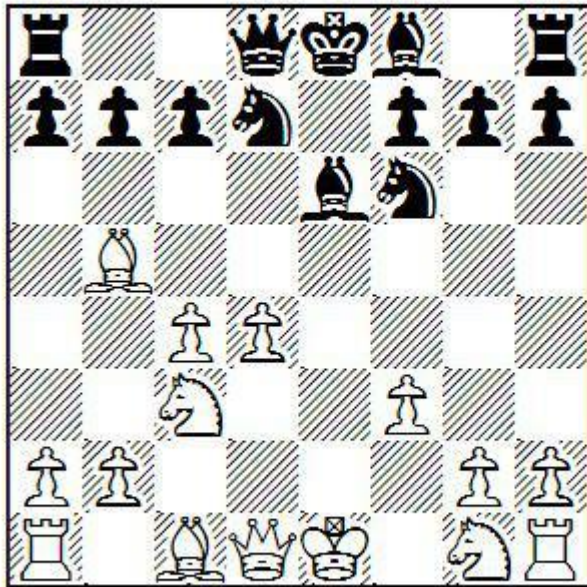
Or 11 ... Qa5 12 Ne2 0-0-0 13 0-0 Nxc5 with equality, E.Kolesnik-S.Krivoshey, Internet (blitz) 2004.

12 g3 Qf6!



Black has excellent compensation for the pawn. White has problems with her development, and 13 Qd2?! Bxc5! gave Black the advantage immediately in G.German-G.P.Vescovi, Villa Martelli 1997.

A22: 8 Nc3



8 ... c6

8 ... Bb4 9 d5 Bf5 transposes to line A2331 (8 d5 Bf5 9 Nc3 Bb4), and was the actual move-order of Game 3 (Paragua-Smerdon).

9 d5 Bxd5

9 ... cxb5 is also unclear, but I prefer the text.

10 cxd5 cxb5 11 d6

11 Nxb5? Bc5! 12 Qe2+ Kf8 leaves White with horrible problems on the g1-a7 diagonal, and the immediate attempt to provide cover with 13 Be3?? loses to 13 ... Bxe3 14 Qxe3 Qa5+!.

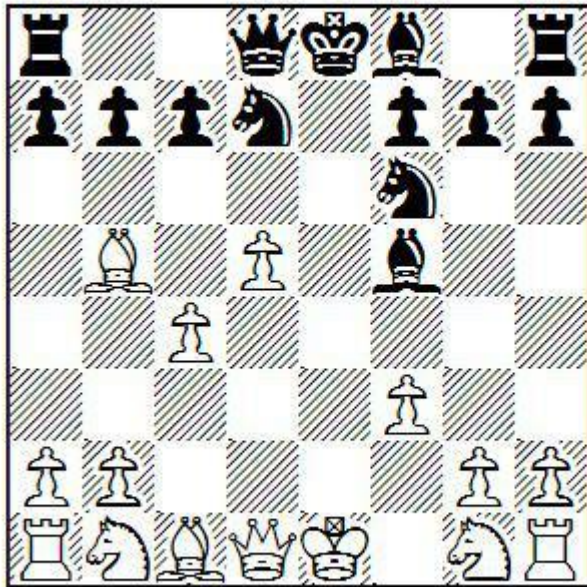
11 ... Nc5

11 ... Qa5!? 12 Qe2+ Kd8 is more ambitious, but it feels quite unnatural for our repertoire to leave the black king in the centre while his colleague is allowed to castle safely.

12 Qe2+ Ne6 13 Qxb5+ Qd7

The position is equal, B.Van Oudvorst-J.Perez Gandesa, Calvia 2004.

A23: 8 d5 Bf5



The main line continues with 9 Nc3!, which is undoubtedly best. Surprisingly, White quite often chooses other developing tries, despite their perilous nature.

A231: 9 Be3?!

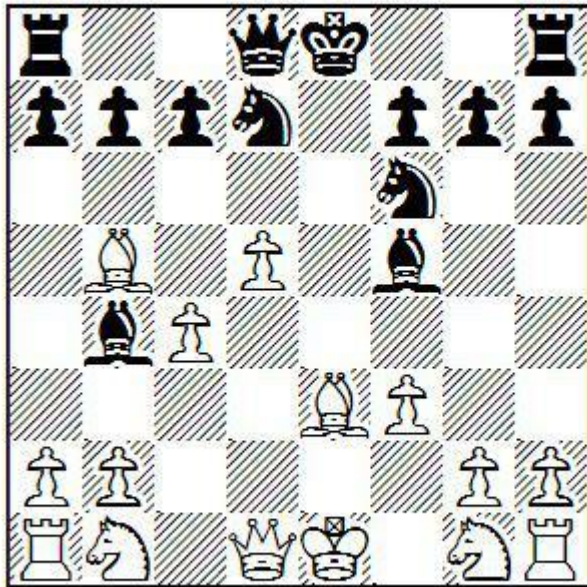
A232: 9 Ne2

A233: 9 Nc3!

A231: 9 Be3?!

This natural developing move leaves White with huge difficulties.

9 ... Bb4+!



White's position is already untenable.

10 Bd2!

The best chance. Alternatives lose swiftly:

- a) 10 Kf2? 0-0, followed by ... Ne5 with an unstoppable attack. Once again, 11 g4? loses to 11 ... Nxg4+ 12 fxg4 Qh4+ etc.
- b) 10 Nd2? 0-0 and ... Re8 wins in short order.
- c) 10 Nc3? Qe7 11 Qe2 0-0 gives Black an overwhelming attack. Note that 12 0-0-0? Bxc3 13 bxc3 Rfe8 14 Re1 c6 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 Bxc6 Ne5! ends the game immediately.

10 ... Be7!

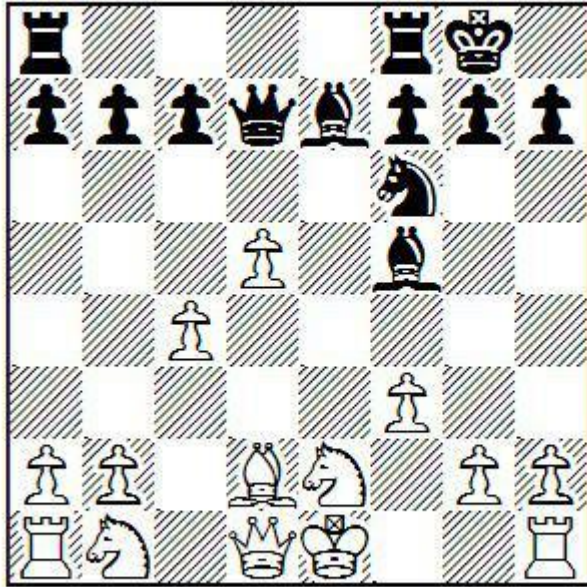
A paradoxical retreat, but White's pieces are currently falling over each other in their scramble to get out, so Black's dark-squared bishop prefers to wait patiently and unleash its deadly force in due time. Moreover, Black's other bishop now has access to the d3-square, which, we will soon see, is quite handy indeed.

The simple 10 ... Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 0-0 12 Ne2 Nc5 is very strong too, as the threat of ... a7-a6 is hard to meet.

11 Ne2 0-0 12 Bxd7

12 0-0? is met by the standard remedy 12 ... Nb6!, followed by ... a7-a6, when the c4-pawn is chronically weak; and 12 Nd4 Bg6 13 Bxd7 Nxd7 14 0-0 Ne5! is clearly better for Black.

12 ... Qxd7



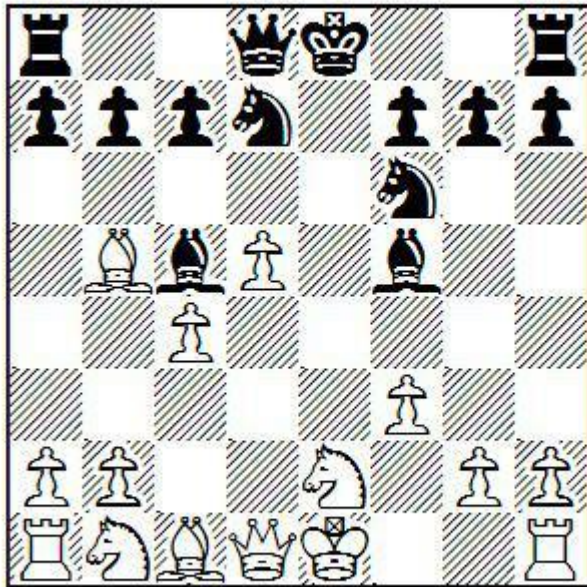
13 0-0

The most natural move, if not the best; but otherwise Black can continue ... Rfe8 and ... b7-b5 with a comfortable edge.

13 ... Bd3! 14 b3 b5!

White's centre collapses, leaving Black with a clear advantage.

A232: 9 Ne2 Bc5!



Black's dark-squared bishop avails itself of its favourite diagonal. The position is already dangerous for White, who can no longer counter with a queen check on e2.

10 Ng3!

Best, although it leads by force to an endgame that is slightly more pleasant for Black.

Instead:

a) 10 Nd4? Qe7+! is extremely strong. For example, 11 Kf2 0-0 12 Be3 Bg6 13 Re1 Ne5! 14 Kf1 Nd3! 15 Re2 a6 16 Bg1 Qd6 17 Ba4 Qb6 was completely crushing in El.Forsaa-P.O.Andersen, Reykjavik 2014.

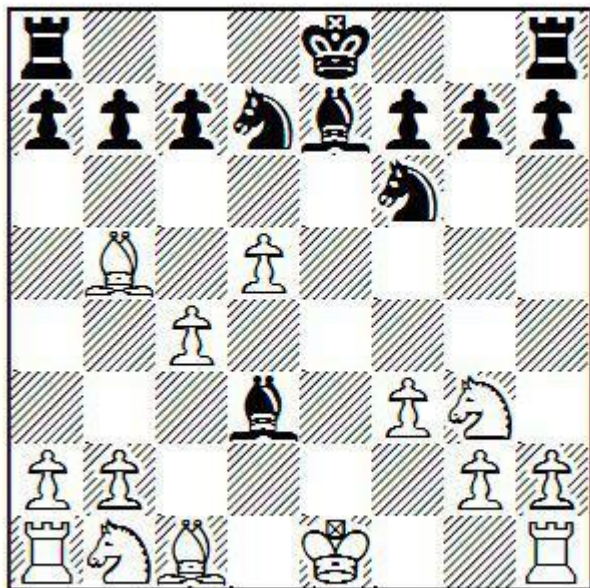
b) 10 g4?! Bg6 11 Kf1 Nxg4!! 12 fxg4 Qh4 13 Ng3 Qh3+ 14 Ke1 0-0 with a decisive attack, R.Schoorl-M.Naalden, Dieren 2003.

10 ... Qe7+

10 ... Bg6!? is a very respectable alternative, keeping the queens on the board. After 11 Qe2+ Kf8! 12 Be3 Qe7!, Black has excellent compensation. A recent game from the motherland of this opening continued in energetic fashion: 13 Bxc5 Qxc5 14 Nc3 c6! 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 Ba4 Re8 17 Nge4 Bxe4 18 fxe4 Nxe4! 19 Nxe4 Qb4+ 20 Kd1 Qxa4+ 21 b3 Qa5 22 Qf3? Qe5!! 23 Nc3 Qd4+ 24 Kc2 Re3 25

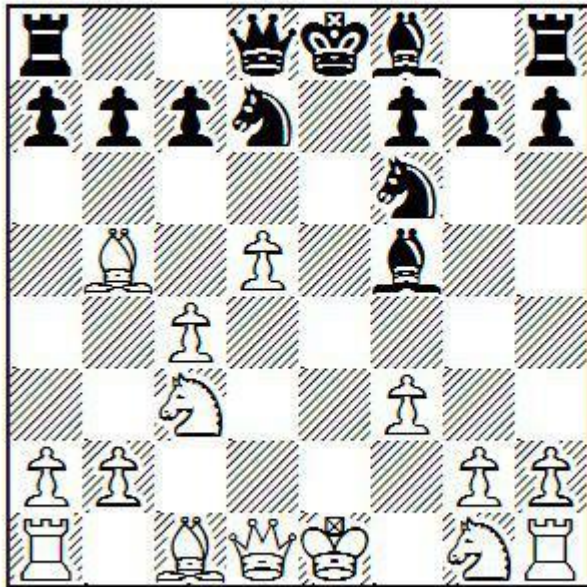
Rad1 Qxc3+ 0-1 J.M.Monteiro-V.Diogo, Portuguese Championship, Lisbon 2014.

11 Qe2 Bd3! 12 Qxe7+ Bxe7



Black's initiative continues into the endgame. She will follow up with ... 0-0-0, after which White's stranded king will struggle to find a safe haven.

A233: 9 Nc3!



After the text, we reach a critical tabiya for the Jadoul. Black's most popular and consistent choice has always been 9 ... Bb4, but personally I have a slight leaning towards 9 ... Bc5. The choice is essentially a matter of taste, and we will begin by delving into the theory of these two main moves.

For those seeking less explored waters, or who are worried about a booked-up opponent, we will then consider three interesting surprise weapons on which there is basically no theory other than my own. In particular, I should draw your attention to 9 ... Bd6!?, an almost-novelty with many subtleties, and 9 ... a6!?, which seems like a favourable insertion at this moment. You may wish just to focus on the choice that suits you, and ignore the rest. Nevertheless, I would again urge you to read over the complete set of lines to build up your mental stock of typical themes, patterns and ideas. The Jadoul variation is crammed full of fascinating and unusual tactical possibilities that can often be applied across different variations.

After 9 Nc3 we have:

A2331: 9 ... Bb4 (the main move)

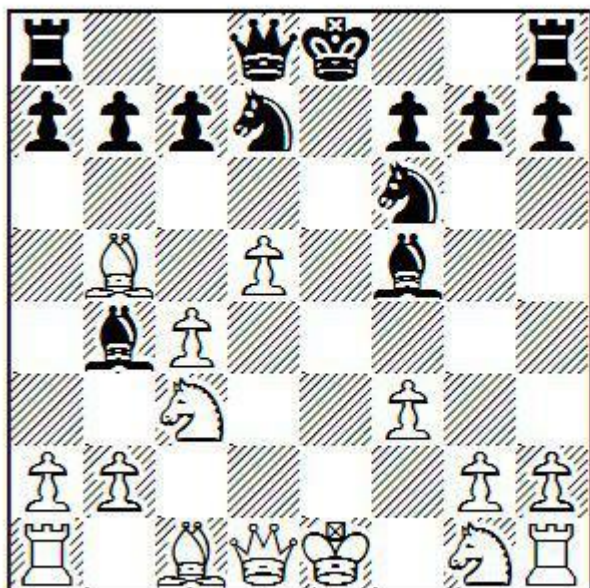
A2332: 9 ... Bc5

A2333: 9 ... Bd6!?

A2334: 9 ... Be7!?

A2335: 9 ... a6!?

A2331: 9 ... Bb4



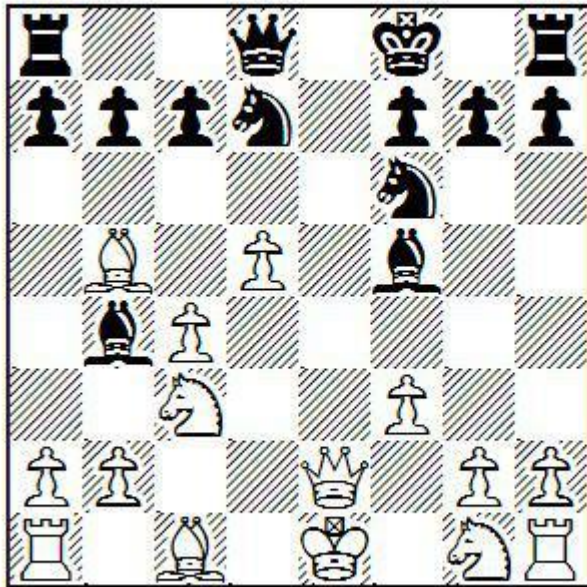
The main move. This variation can also be used to sidestep the 8 Nc3 line on account of 8 ... Bb4 (instead of 8 ... c6), after which 9 d5 Bf5 transposes. From the diagram, 10 Ne2 is usually automatic, but there is one logical alternative.

A23311: 10 Qe2+

A23312: 10 Ne2

The novelty 10 Bg5!? is an interesting try to prevent Black from recapturing on d7 with the knight. However, after 10 ... 0-0 11 Bxd7, Black can simply allow the doubling of the f-pawns with 11 ... Qxd7! 12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 Ne2 Bc5, when Black's bishops dominate the board.

A23311: 10 Qe2+ Kf8!



Black has excellent compensation. A common theme in the Jadoul is that Black shouldn't mind too much about answering a queen check on e2 with a deft shuffle of her king to f8. Evacuating e8 for a rook to occupy the deadly e-file is usually more important than the lost castling rights. By the way, 10 ... Qe7 is perfectly acceptable, but the text is stronger.

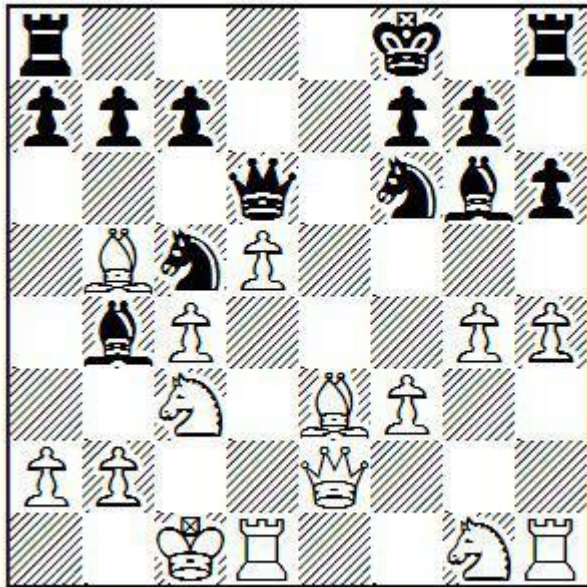
11 g4

11 Be3 Nc5 12 0-0-0 Qd6! 13 Ne4 (or 13 g4 Bg6 with a clear advantage, in addition to the more immediate, fatal threat of 14 Nh3? a6!, which actually occurred in J.Rohl Montes-A.Vitor, World Student Team Championship, Parnaiba 1995) 13 ... Nfxe4 14 fxe4 Nxe4 15 Nf3 with chances for both sides in J.Brain-S.Krivoshey, Dos Hermanas, Internet (blitz) 2004; Black has regained the pawn, but neither king is safe.

11 ... Bg6 12 h4 Nc5! 13 Be3

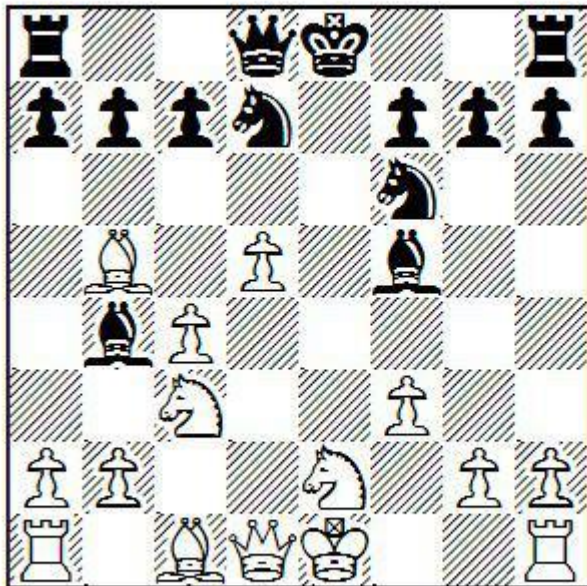
13 h5? Bd3! wins, as ... a7-a6 follows.

13 ... h6 14 0-0-0 Qd6



Here White blundered with 15 Na4?? a6! and quickly capitulated in H.Rübensam-S.Krivoshey, Guben 2000.

A23312: 10 Ne2



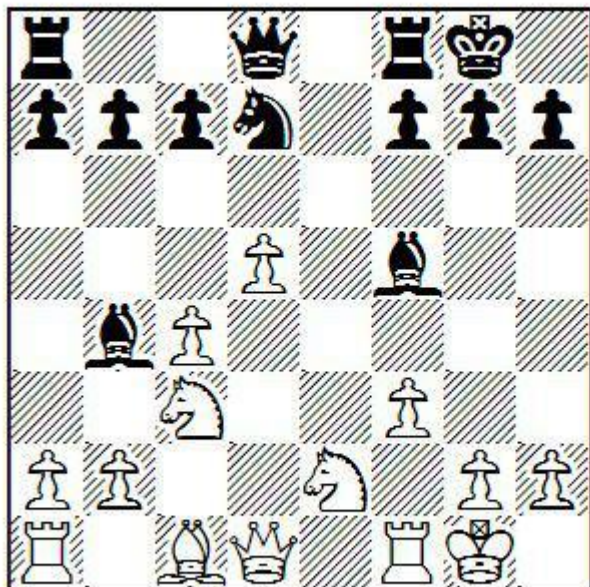
10 ... 0-0 11 Bxd7!

11 0-0? Ne5! is a surprisingly common mistake by White; see Game 3 (Paragua-Smerdon).

11 ... Nxd7!

A key recapture. The knight eyes up the e5-square, from which it has ambitions towards d3 and the pawn on c4.

12 0-0



Here, the accepted main line of the Jadoul variation reaches a critical junction. Black is very active and has excellent lines and squares for her pieces. White, to her credit, has secured the extra pawn, maintained control of the centre, and managed to evacuate her king to safety. The play now revolves around whether Black can drum up substantial attacking chances or create weaknesses within the opposing structure before White can consolidate her extra material.

Black has tried many moves in this position, the most popular being 12 ... Ne5 and 12 ... Nc5. However, both knight moves are weak! In fact, only two of Black's twelfth-move alternatives really impress me: 12 ... Re8 and Damaso's recent 12 ... Qe7!?. We will consider five possibilities for Black. I realize that the labels of our lines are getting long and a little unsightly, but fear not – I promise that this is the longest branch!

A233121: 12 ... Qh4?!

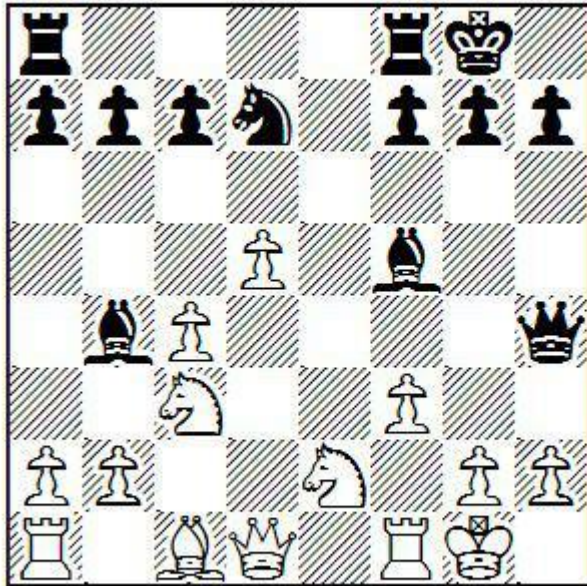
A233122: 12 ... Ne5?!

A233123: 12 ... Nc5?!

A233124: 12 ... Qe7!?

A233125: 12 ... Re8

A233121: 12 ... Qh4?!



A natural and aggressive thrust, swinging the queen to the kingside and simultaneously threatening the c4-pawn. Unfortunately, White has a strong reply.

13 Ng3!

After this move, White is better. 13 Nd4?! was a suggestion in *Nunn's Chess Openings*, but then 13 ... Bg6! gives Black reasonable compensation.

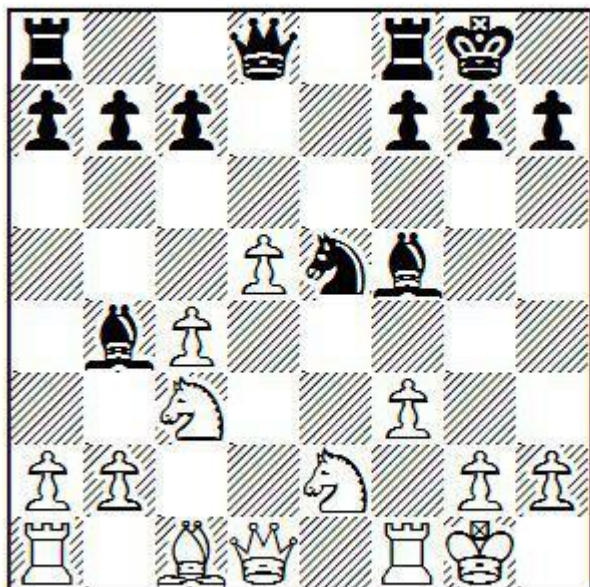
13 ... Bg6

13 ... Bc5+ 14 Kh1 Bd6 15 f4! is better for White.

14 Nce4 h6 15 Bd2 Bc5+ 16 Kh1 Bd4 17 Nf5!

White has a clear advantage, J.Smeets-D.Smerdon, World Junior Championships, Kochin 2004. Incidentally, this was my first ever loss in the Portuguese, and a good lesson at that.

A233122: 12 ... Ne5?!



This has been Black's most popular choice, with which she has a simply terrible score. And no wonder: after ...

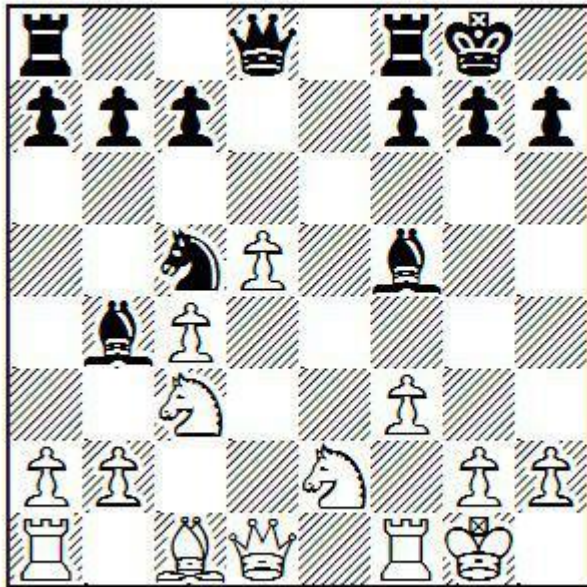
13 Ng3! Bd7

13 ... Bg6 14 f4! wins a piece, and 13 ... Bd3? 14 Re1 wins material too.

14 Qd4

Black has little to show for the pawn. For example, 14 ... Qe7 15 Nge4 c5 16 dxc6 Nxc6 17 Qf2 and White has a clear advantage.

A233123: 12 ... Nc5?!



Heading for d3, while keeping the e-file uncluttered.

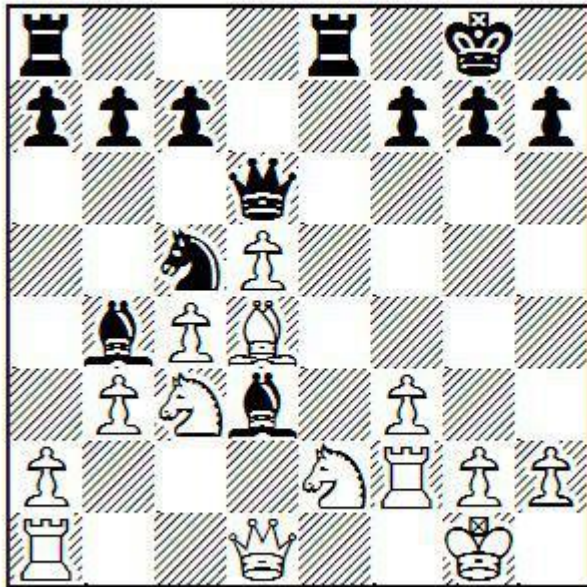
13 Be3 Re8 14 Bd4!

14 Bxc5? Bxc5+ 15 Kh1 Qh4! gives Black the initiative, and 16 b3? Re3! 17 g3 Qf6 18 Na4? Bd3! 19 Rf2 Bxe2 0-1 was the gruesome finish to L.Dworakowski-S.Krivoshey, Koszalin 1998.

14 ... Bd3 15 b3 Qd6

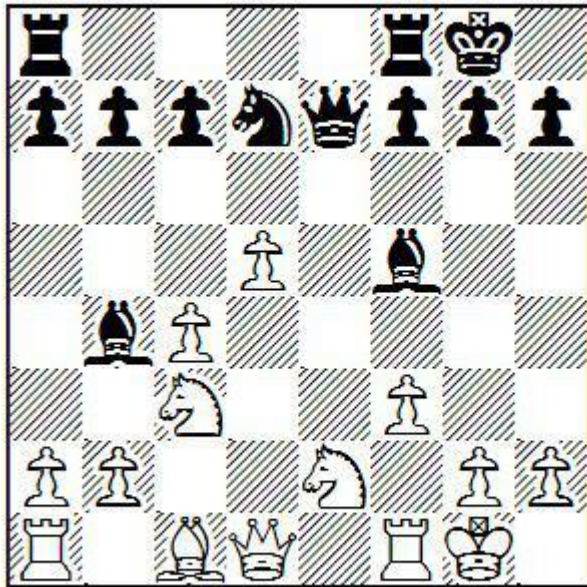
15 ... b5 16 a3 bxc4 17 axb4 Nxb3 18 Ra2 is clearly better for White.

16 Rf2!



White has a clear advantage. Black's initiative has run out of steam, and suddenly her aggressively-posted minor pieces are beginning to look vulnerable. For example, 16 ... Bg6? 17 Nb5! Qe7 18 a3 and White is winning, L.Stevanec-A.Carvalho, World Junior Championships, Medellin 1996.

A233124: 12 ... Qe7!?



An interesting recent try by Damaso, so it deserves our attention. There is as yet no established theory on this move, but my analysis suggests that Black has excellent chances to take over the initiative. Although further practical tests are needed, a good knowledge of these lines will guarantee that you secure fantastic practical chances in an over-the-board game.

13 Kh1

Tiviakov's choice. Others:

a) 13 Bf4!? leads almost by force to an equal endgame, after some intermediate fireworks: 13 ... Qc5+ 14 Qd4 Nb6 15 Rac1 (15 b3 Bd3 is awkward for White) 15 ... Qxc4 16 Qxc4 Nxc4 17 Nd4! Bc5 18 Ncb5 Bd3! 19 Rfd1 Nxb2 20 Rd2 Bb6 21 Rxb2 Bxb5 22 Rxb5 Bxd4+ 23 Kf1 c6! with equality.

b) 13 Nd4 Bg6 14 f4 Bc5! shouldn't worry Black either; for example, 15 Na4 (15 f5 is met by 15 ... Bh5!) 15 ... Bc2 16 Qxc2 Bxd4+ 17 Kh1 Nf6 with compensation.

13 ... Ne5!

A novelty, and a natural improvement. The inclusion of Kh1 and ... Qe7 undoubtedly favours Black in comparison with 12 ... Ne5, as the extra control over e5 allows Black to meet 14 Ng3 with ... Bd3.

Instead, after 13 ... Rae8?! 14 Bf4 Nc5 15 d6!, White was well on top in S.Tiviakov-R.Damaso, Portuguese Team Championship 2014.

14 b3

Alternatively:

a) 14 Qb3? Bd3! is very good for Black.

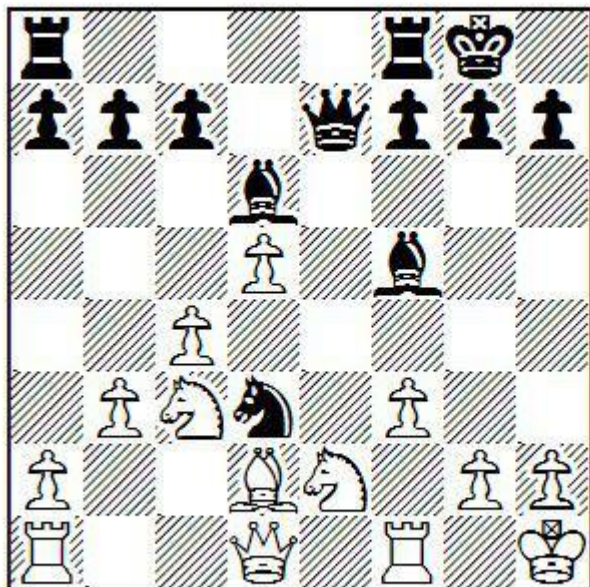
b) 14 Bf4 Nxc4 15 Qb3 Nb6 offers roughly level chances.

c) 14 Ng3 Bd3! 15 Re1 Bxc4 wins the pawn back, as 16 f4? is hit by the powerful rejoinder 16 ... Ng4!.

14 ... Nd3! 15 Bd2

15 Ng3 Bxc3 16 Nxf5 Qf6 17 Qxd3 Bxa1 gives White some compensation for the material (for a change). Chances are level.

15 ... Bd6!

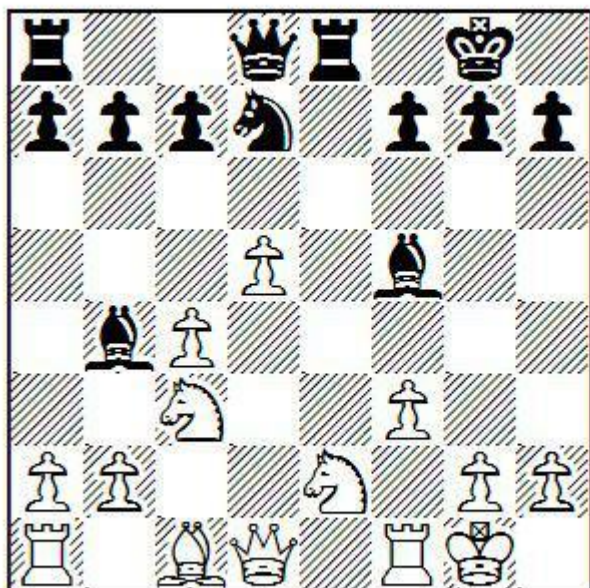


The bishop has caused much mischief on this side of the board, but now it has become more of a hindrance to Black's activity than an advantage. After this retreat, Black's compensation is obvious. Play might continue 16 Be1 Nxe1 17 Qxe1 Rae8 18 Nd4 Qf6 19 Qd2 Bg6 with the typical long-term (and sufficient) compensation of the bishop pair; doubling on the e-file and a short exploration by the a-pawn are likely plans.

Many more practical tests are needed before we can draw any concrete conclusions, but my feeling is that 12 ... Qe7 is the most

promising of Black's twelfth-move alternatives, should the main line encounter problems in the future.

A233125: 12 ... Re8



As with its intriguing cousin 12 ... Qe7!?, immediately occupying the central open file seems to be a promising way for Black to continue.

13 Ng3

13 a3 Bc5+ 14 Kh1 Ne5! 15 b4 Bf8 gives Black very good compensation. White's queenside pawn phalanx may look impressive, but the pawns will very quickly become liabilities. For example, 16 c5 (or 16 Qd4 c5! 17 bxc5 Rc8 18 d6 b6! with a clear advantage to Black; White's pawns will soon drop like a dubstep beat) 16 ... a5 17 Be3 Nd3 with strong pressure.

13 ... Bg6 14 Nce4 c6!

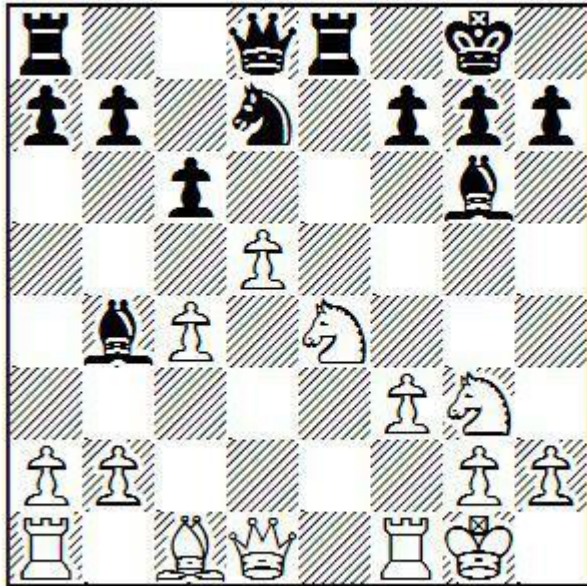
This novelty strives to undermine White's centre in order to open more lines for Black's pieces. Only two other games have reached the position after 14 Nce4, and in both cases Black chose a different continuation:

a) 14 ... a5 15 Kh1 f5 16 Ng5 Nf8 17 Nh3 Qf6 gave Black a certain amount of compensation in R.Berzinsh-Gr.Buckley, British League

2005, but 15 Bg5! would have been more testing.

b) 14 ... Nc5 is strongly met by 15 a3! Nxe4 16 axb4! (16 Nxe4 Bf8! 17 Qd4?! b6! 18 Kh1 Qh4! gave Black an initiative, R.Eames-S.Lalic, British League 2008, though White can improve with 17 Re1! c6! 18 Bg5 f6 19 Bf4 Bf7! with equal chances) 16 ... Nxc3 17 hxg3 Qd6 18 Qd4! and no matter which pawn Black captures, White has a pleasant advantage in the opposite-coloured bishop middlegame.

After 14 ... c6!,



we officially enter unexplored territory. However, I have a good degree of confidence in the potential of Black's position. With two bishops, open lines and a far healthier pawn structure, Black has scope for active operations on both sides of the board. On the other hand, you should not forget that one of the reasons for Black's fewer pawn weaknesses is her fewer pawns!

Let's take a look at some sample lines to better understand Black's typical ideas, though as far as memorizing the theory goes, this is a sensible place to stop.

15 Kh1

Instead:

a) 15 dxc6? Qb6+! is 'the point' of ... c7-c6. After 16 Kh1 Qxc6 17 Qd5 (17 b3 Nf6! gives Black the advantage) 17 ... Qxd5 18 cxd5

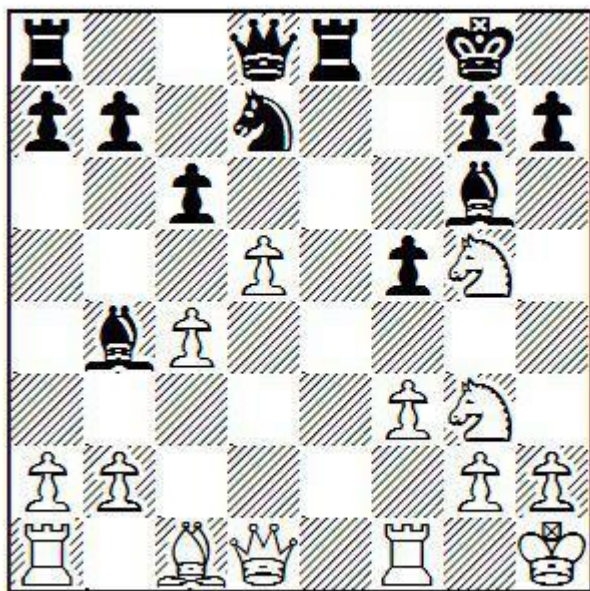
Rad8, Black will soon regain the pawn while retaining a slight advantage.

b) 15 Bf4 cxd5 16 cxd5 (White would prefer to avoid the isolated pawn, but 16 Qxd5 Qb6+ 17 Kh1 Rad8! places her queen in an uncomfortable position, and the endgame after 18 Qb5 Qxb5 19 cxb5 Ne5! offers no relief) 16 ... Qb6+ 17 Kh1 h5! and White's knights are beginning to feel uncomfortable. Note that 18 h4 Be7! is no help.

15 ... f5!?

15 ... cxd5 16 Bg5! Qa5 17 cxd5 f5! 18 a3 Bf8 19 Nc3 Bd6 gives Black a certain amount of compensation for the pawn, although I somehow doubt it is objectively sufficient.

16 Ng5!



The most ambitious try, eyeing up the e6-square.

16 Bg5 Qb6 17 Nc3 (17 dxc6 Qxc6 gives Black plenty of compensation; one forcing line is 18 a3 fxe4! 19 axb4 exf3 20 Rxf3 Ne5 21 Rc3 h6 22 Be3 Rad8 23 Qb3 Bf7! 24 b5 Qg6! and Black has a slight advantage) 17 ... Bxc3!? (the immediate 17 ... h6 18 Bf4 Rad8 comes into consideration) 18 bxc3 Qc5 (again, 18 ... h6 19 Bf4 Rad8 could be considered) 19 Qd4 Qxd4 20 cxd4 cxd5 21 cxd5 Nf6!

22 d6 (22 Bxf6 gxf6 is just equal) 22 ... Red8 23 Bf4 Ne8 with equality.

16 ... Nb6

16 ... Nf6 is also interesting, if inferior to the text with best play:

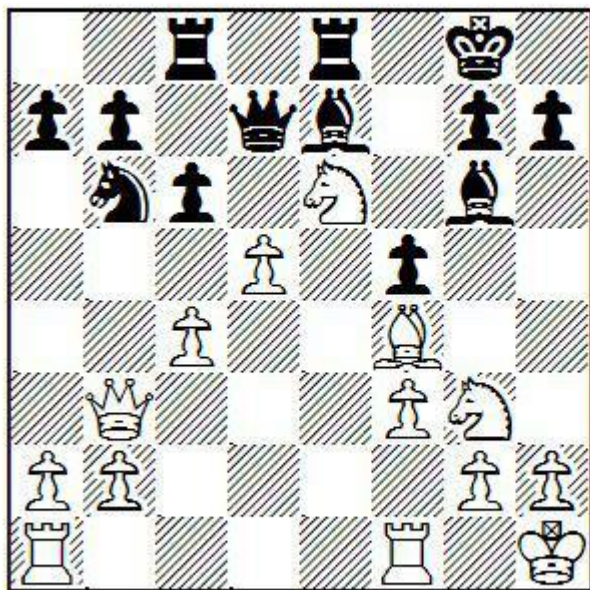
a) 17 Qb3 Qa5 18 a3 Bf8! offers sufficient compensation. White's pieces are discoordinated and offside, and Black has many pawn weaknesses at which to aim. Note that 19 Qxb7? Rab8 20 Qxc6?? (20 b4 Rxb7 21 bxa5 cxd5 is clearly better for Black) 20 ... Rb6 21 Qc7 Bd6 wins the white queen.

b) 17 Ne6! Qd7 18 Bf4! (18 Qb3 a5 19 Bf4 cxd5! 20 Nc7 dxc4! 21 Qd1 Qc6 22 Nxe8 Rxe8 gives Black active counterplay for the exchange) 18 ... Ba5 (18 ... Rac8 19 Qb3 cxd5 20 Nxg7! Qxg7 21 Qxb4 favours White) 19 Qa4 cxd5 20 Qxd7 Nxd7 21 cxd5 Rac8 22 Rfd1! and although Black can infiltrate on c2, I can't believe that her compensation is sufficient.

17 Qb3!

17 dxc6 bxc6 18 b3 Qf6! gives Black a healthy initiative.

17 ... Be7 18 Ne6 Qd7 19 Bf4 Rac8!



20 Nc7!?

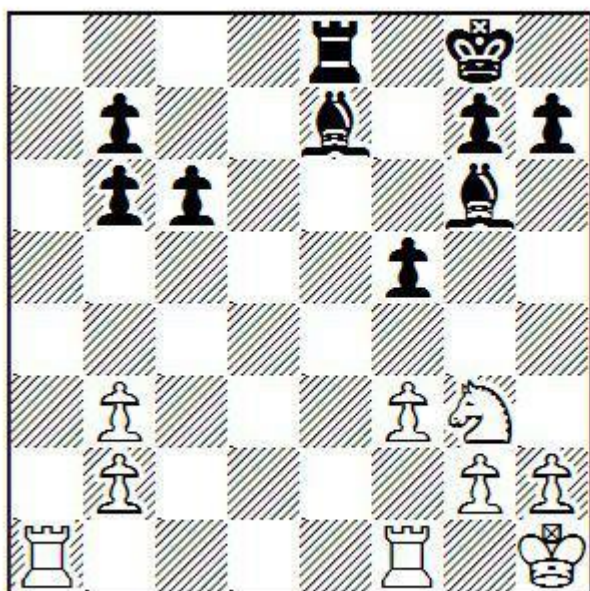
A very pretty trick that wins the exchange; fortunately for Black, her compensation is sufficient even here.

20 Rad1 is more sound, though Black's position remains healthy:
 20 ... cxd5 21 cxd5 Bf6 22 Rfe1 Bf7 (22 ... Nc4!? 23 Be3 Nxb2 or 23 Bc1 Nb6! is also fine) 23 Nxf5 Nxd5 24 Rxd5 Rxe6 25 Rg1 (25 Red1 Qe8! favours Black) 25 ... Qc6 26 Nd4 Bxd4 27 Rxd4 Re2 and, in this major piece endgame with opposite-coloured bishops, Black's activity fully compensates for the pawn.

20 ... Rxc7 21 Bxc7 Qxc7 22 d6! Qxd6

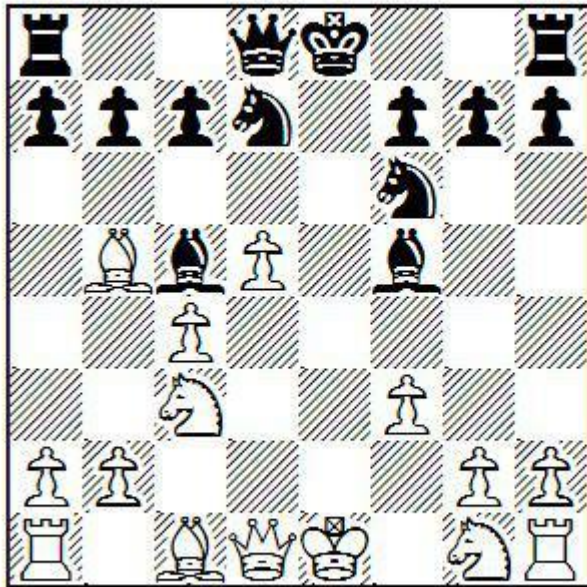
22 ... Bxd6?! 23 c5+ Bf7 24 cxd6 is weaker.

23 c5+ Qd5 24 cxb6 Qxb3 25 axb3 axb6



Black has good compensation; her two powerful bishops will cause havoc to White's mangled queenside pawns. A draw would be a fair result from here.

A2332: 9 ... Bc5



Always a pleasing move to play. Black's bishop dominates the g1-a7 diagonal and prepares kingside castling. The arrival of a rook on e8 would quickly be terminal for White, so her reply is forced.

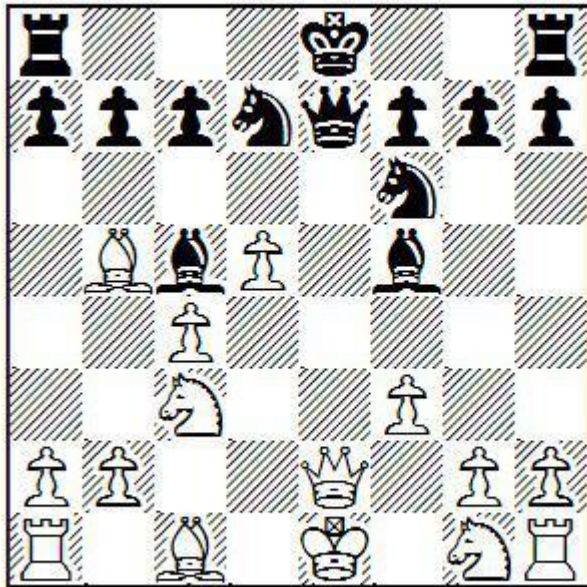
10 Qe2+

Here Black has a pleasant choice. Depending on personal style and mood, Black can choose to enter an endgame with excellent compensation, or keep the queens on the board. My personal preference has switched back and forth over the years (currently, I'm for 10 ... Kf8), but both moves deserve attention.

A23321: 10 ... Qe7

A23322: 10 ... Kf8

A23321: 10 ... Qe7

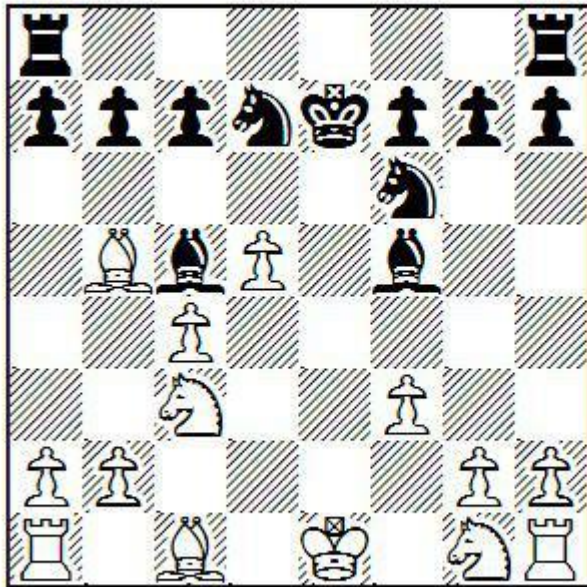


Quite an acceptable offer to exchange queens; Black's compensation extends into the endgame, thanks largely to far superior development and the awkwardly-placed white bishop on b5. I have a strange fondness for this move, although 10 ... Kf8 is more popular. A key theme is the poor placement of White's bishop on b5 and particularly its difficulties with meeting ... a7-a6. Exchanging on d7 will usually be met with ... Kxd7, followed by a quick ... b7-b5, while retreating to a4 can often mean a life of solitude for the prelate, should White be forced to play b2-b3 to safeguard the c4-pawn.

11 Qxe7+

Or 11 Bf4 0-0-0 with compensation, while for 11 g4!? see Game 4 (Vajda-Krivoshey).

11 ... Kxe7

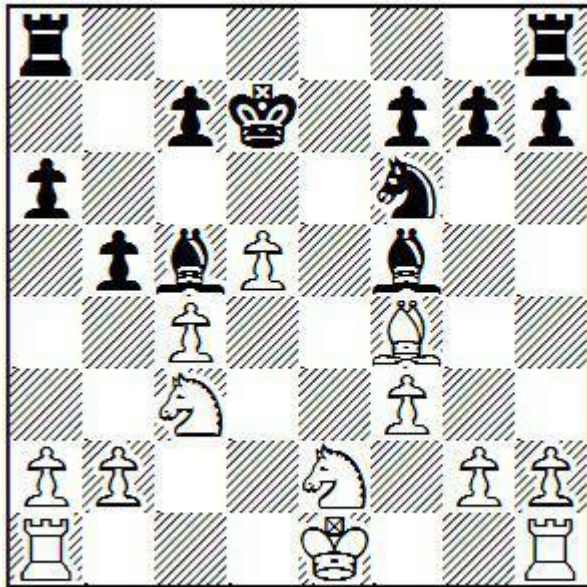


12 Bf4

12 g4 a6?! 13 Bxd7 Bxd7 14 Bf4 b5 was seen in In.Agrest-M.V.Nieto, St Louis 2013, when White could have safely captured on c7 with a clear advantage. But 12 ... Bd3! is good for Black, who can quickly apply uncomfortable pressure on White's queenside pawns: 13 b3 a6 14 Ba4 (or 14 Bxd7 Kxd7, followed by moving a rook to e8 and playing ... b7-b5) 14 ... b5 (my engine's recommendation of 14 ... h6, preventing g4-g5 and so renewing the threat of ... b7-b5, seems strong too) 15 g5! (not 15 cxb5? axb5 16 Nxb5 Nxd5 and Black's development advantage will soon prove decisive) 15 ... Nh5 16 cxb5 Ne5! 17 bxa6 Rxa6 with excellent compensation. White's development is abysmal, and her bishop on a4, though secure, can add little to the defence.

12 ... a6! 13 Ba4

Again, 13 Bxd7 Kxd7 14 Nge2 b5! attacks White's centre before the rest of her forces can come to the defence.



One interesting and plausible computer-inspired continuation is 15 cxb5 axb5 16 Nxb5 Rhe8! 17 Nxc7 Bd3! 18 Kd2 Bxe2 19 a3! Nh5 20 Nxe8 Nxf4 21 Nxg7 Rb8 22 b4 Bd4 23 Nf5 Bxa1 24 Rxa1 Ba6 with a draw the most likely outcome.

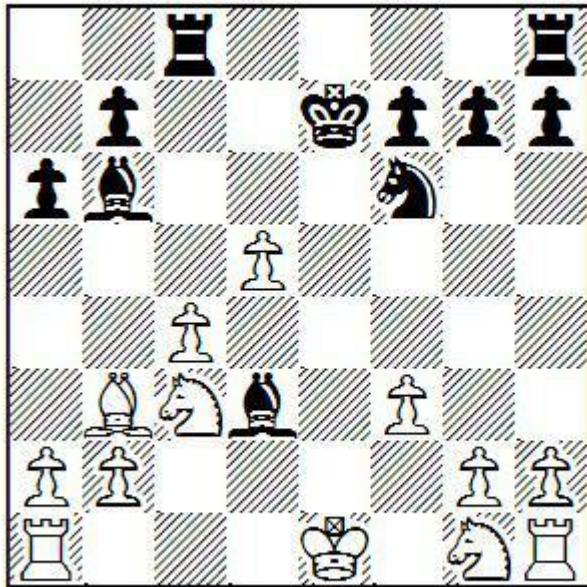
13 ... Nb6!

White is faced with an unpleasant choice.

14 Bb3

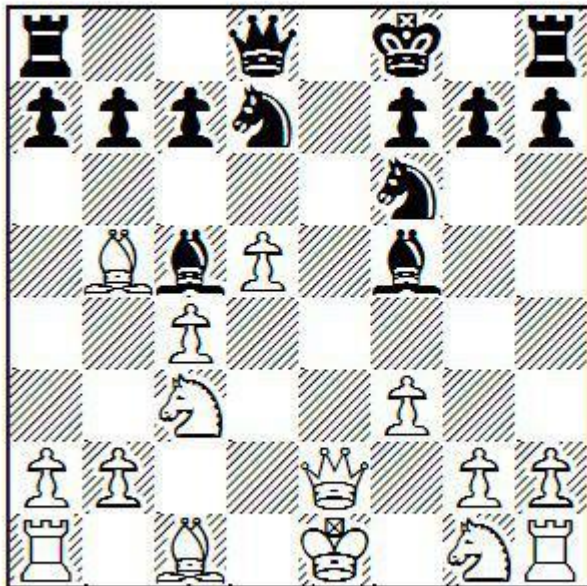
After 14 g4 (14 Bxc7?! Nxc4 favours Black) 14 ... Bg6 15 Bb3 (15 b3 Bb4 16 Bd2 Ba3! is awkward to deal with) 15 ... Bd3 16 Bxc7 Nxc4 17 Bxc4 Bxc4 18 0-0-0 Rac8 19 d6+ Kd7, Black will soon recover the pawn, though the resulting endgame is level.

14 ... Bd3! 15 Bxc7 Rac8! 16 Bxb6 Bxb6



Black has powerful compensation for the two pawns, one of which will likely be regained in quick time.

A23322: 10 ... Kf8



A standard reaction in the Jadoul variation, keeping the queens on and vacating e8 for a rook. However, as we have seen, even in the

endgame Black's compensation can prove dangerous.

11 Be3!

Immediately offering to exchange Black's powerful bishop. Instead, 11 g4? Nxg4! was *Inspirational Game #3*, K.Goh Wei Ming-D.Laylo, Manila 2008.

11 ... Qe7

11 ... Kg8!? is an untested computer suggestion that deserves attention. Black's idea is simply to activate her queen and queen's rook by playing ... Qf8, while the other rook will often develop via ... h7-h5 and ... Rh6. If you are interested in investigating this further, then 12 0-0-0 Qf8 13 Qf2 Bb4! 14 Bxd7 Nxd7 15 Ne4 h5! is a good place to start.

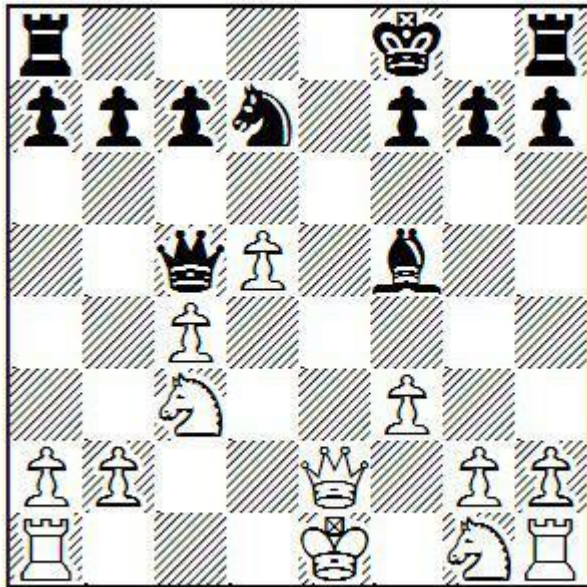
The immediate 11 ... a6!? may be even more promising. One game continued 12 Bxd7 (12 Ba4 Qe7! is an improved version of our main line) 12 ... Nxd7 13 0-0-0 Qh4! (threatening ... Bxe3 and ... Qxc4) 14 Ne4 Bxe4 15 g3 Qe7 16 fxe4 Qxe4 17 Bxc5+ Nxc5 18 Qxe4 Nxe4 and was soon drawn in J.Lanz Calavia-E.Pesonen, correspondence 2000.

12 Bxd7

12 Bf4 gives Black a pleasant choice: 12 ... a6 (or 12 ... Re8 13 0-0-0 Qd8 14 Qf1 h6 15 g4 Bh7 16 Nge2 g5 17 Bd2 Ne5 18 Bxe8 Nd3+ 19 Kb1 Nb4+ 20 Kc1 with an eventual draw in F.Castaldo-M.Perez Candelario, Aviles 2000) 13 Ba4 (13 Qxe7+ Kxe7 14 Ba4 Nb6 transposes to 13 ... Nb6 in line A23321) 13 ... Nb6 14 0-0-0?! Qxe2 15 Ngxe2 Nxc4 with equality, R.Degerhammar-P.Corbat, correspondence 2007.

12 ... Nxd7 13 Bxc5 Qxc5

Maintaining control of the dark squares. Black's position looks menacing, but White has one noticeable advantage in comparison with similar lines: Black's king cannot castle. White's best chance therefore requires her to give the pawn back in exchange for rapid development.



14 Qf2!

14 Ne4 blocks the e-file, but White is running dangerously behind in development and will most likely have to return the pawn to reach the safety of an endgame: 14 ... Qb6! (14 ... Qb4+!? 15 Qd2 a5 16 Ne2 Bxe4 17 fxe4 Nc5 18 Qxb4 axb4 19 0-0 Re8 was slightly better for White, though eventually drawn in E.Sveshnikov-M.Cebalo, Slovenian Team Championship 1997) 15 Qf2 Re8 16 Qxb6 axb6 17 0-0-0 Bxe4 was equal in A.Luchko-P.Corbat, correspondence 2007.

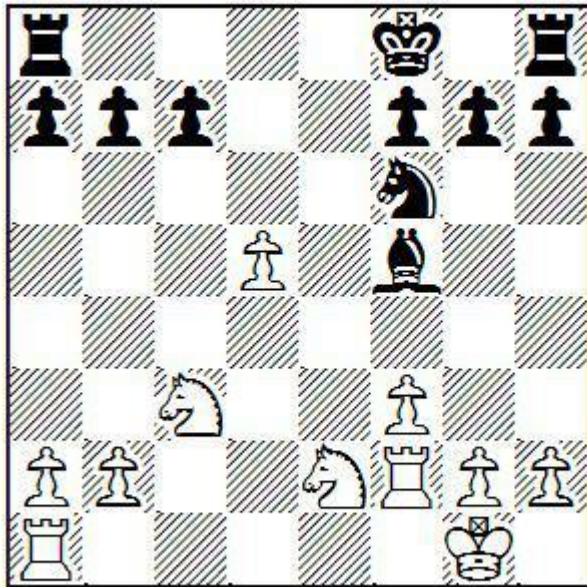
14 ... Qxc4 15 Nge2

15 0-0-0?? Nc5! is immediately crushing.

15 ... Qc5!

15 ... Qb4 is risky: after 16 0-0 Qxb2 17 Ne4, it is suddenly Black's king who is starting to feel uncomfortable.

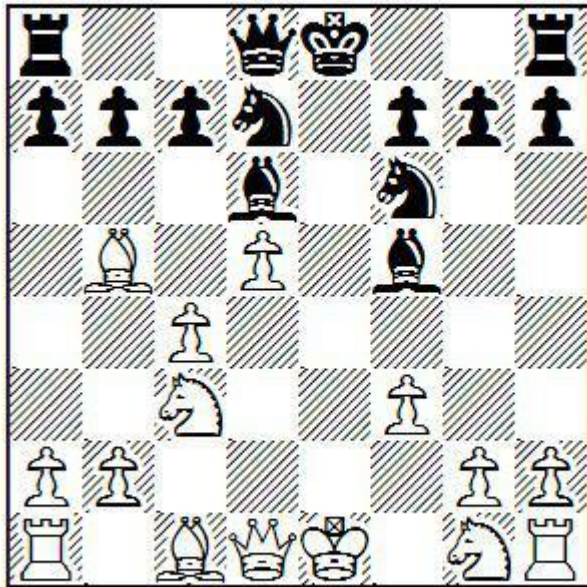
16 0-0 Qxf2+ 17 Rxf2 Nf6!



White's d-pawn is chronically weak, and as the endgame rapidly approaches, it transpires that Black's king is optimally placed close to the centre. Ultimately, White's slightly superior space and activity are enough to compensate for the pawn weakness, so a draw is the most likely result.

Play might continue 18 Ng3 Bd7 (18 ... Bg6 19 Rc1 h5!? is also interesting) 19 Nge4 (19 Rc1 Rd8 20 Nge4 Ne8 is close to equal) 19 ... Nxe4 20 Nxe4 Ke7 21 Re1 Rab8! (the discovered checks are harmless) 22 Rc2 Rhc8 23 Kf2 Kf8 24 g4 c6 25 Nc5 Rd8 26 d6 Bc8 27 Rd2 b6 28 Ne4 Be6 29 b4 ½-½ C.Teichmann-V.Destruels Moreno, correspondence 2008.

A2333: 9 ... Bd6!?



Here we turn to the first of Black's rarer alternatives after 9 Nc3. There is very little established theory or practice on these lines, but I have tried to give you an idea of the critical variations to get you started, should you wish to pursue your own research. 9 ... Bd6!? is not technically a novelty (it was played once before in an under-10s game!), but is certainly an unexpected move. At first, it seems illogical to develop the bishop here, seeing as there are two extremely attractive diagonals that could be reached from c5 or b4. However, Black has some tricks in store from this square as well, anticipating that her knight might like to use the c5-square in the near future.

After 9 ... Bd6, White has a choice of five moves, three of which can be quickly dealt with:

A23331: 10 Nge2

A23332: 10 Bg5

The inferior moves are:

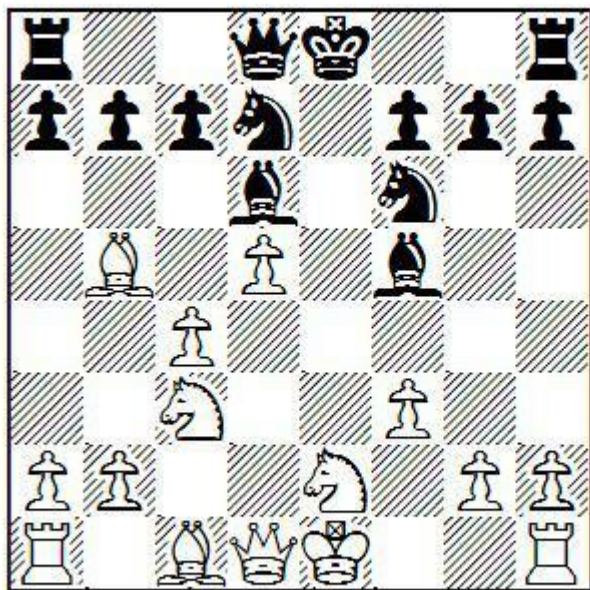
a) 10 Be3?! 0-0 and now, since 11 Qd2? Nc5! and 11 Kf2? Ne5! are both horrible, White has nothing better than 11 Nge2 Nb6!,

transposing to 10 Nge2 0-0 11 Be3?! Nb6 (in line A23331), which favours Black.

b) 10 g4?! is significant only because, as opposed to many other instances you will see throughout this book, the tempting 10 ... Nxg4?? does not work this time: after 11 fxg4 Qh4+ 12 Kf1, White has the possibility of Qe1+. Instead, the calm 10 ... Bg6 11 h4 h6 12 h5 Bh7 leaves White struggling to justify her kingside expansion; for example, 13 g5 hxg5 14 Bxg5 Kf8! 15 h6 Qe7+ 16 Kf1 Ne5! with excellent compensation.

c) 10 Qe2+?! is of course met by 10 ... Kf8, when 11 Be3 Nc5! showcases one of the advantages of developing the bishop to d6. Black threatens ... a7-a6 and is already beginning to get on top.

A23331: 10 Nge2



This is a serious alternative.

10 ... 0-0 11 Bxd7!?

The voluntary exchange is necessary to prevent difficulties arising after ... Nb6. For example:

a) 11 Be3?! Nb6! 12 c5 (12 Bxb6 cxb6 is already much better for Black) 12 ... Nbxd5! and the tactics favour Black.

b) 11 0-0 receives the same treatment 11 ... Nb6!, followed by ... a7-a6.

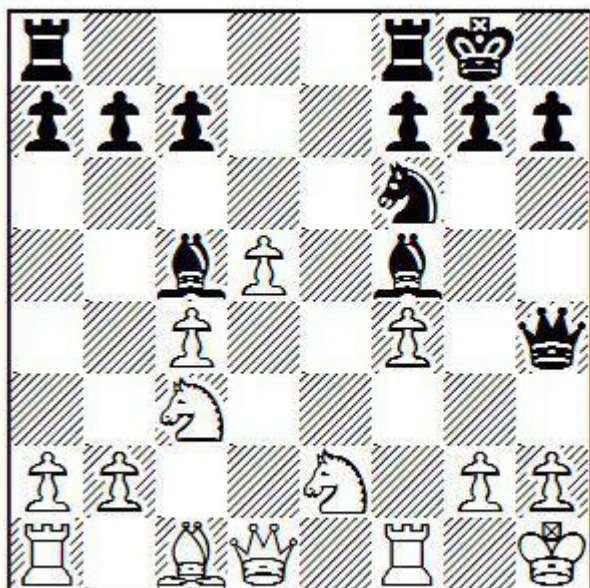
11 ... Nxd7 12 0-0 Qh4!

This shows one of the key points behind placing the bishop on d6.

13 f4 Bc5+

13 ... Rae8!? 14 Ng3! Bg4 15 Qd3 f5!?, with the idea of ... Rf6-h6, is also interesting.

14 Kh1 Nf6



15 Nd4

15 Ng3?? is a prompt disaster: 15 ... Ng4 16 h3 Qxg3 17 hxg4 Qh4 mate.

15 ... Ng4

Or 15 ... Bg4!? 16 Nf3 Qh5 with compensation.

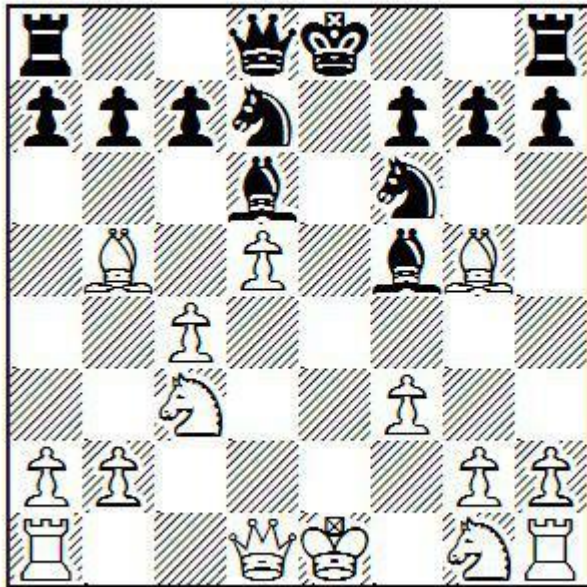
16 h3 g6! 17 Nxf5 gxf5 18 Ne4!

Other moves will likely result in a draw via ... Nf2+/ ... Ng4+ in the near future.

18 ... fxe4 19 Qxg4+ Qxg4 20 hxg4 e3!

And a draw should result.

A23332: 10 Bg5



Natural and probably best, threatening to double Black's pawns on f6. However, the consequences of such a trade – giving Black two bishops against two knights – aren't to be underestimated.

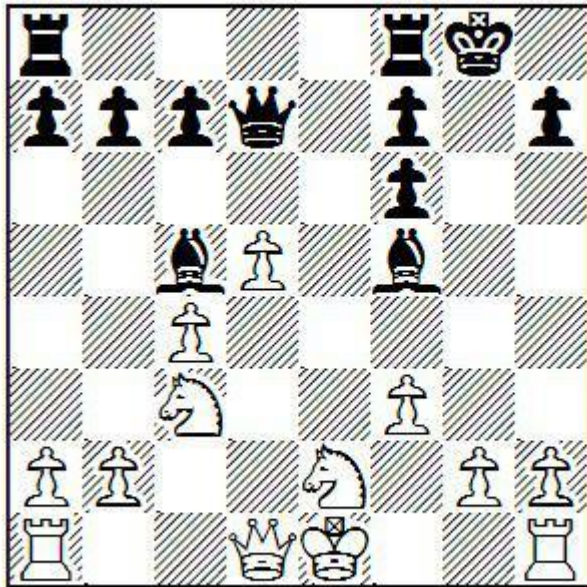
10 ... 0-0! 11 Bxd7

The only consistent continuation. Instead, 11 Nge2? Ne5! is clearly better for Black; while 11 g4? was Ba.Lengyel-Y.Bruned, World Junior (U-10) Championships, Oropesa del Mar 1999 (the only game to feature 9 ... Bd6 to date) and here 11 ... a6! immediately gifts Black the advantage.

11 ... Qxd7 12 Nge2

12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 Nge2 gives Black an extra option in 13 ... Qe7!? (13 ... Bc5 transposes to the main line) 14 0-0 Qe3+ 15 Kh1 Bd3, which places White in an uncomfortable bind, with ... Qh6 ideas in the air. After 16 f4 Rae8 17 Rf3 Bxe2 18 Rxe3 Bxd1 19 Rxe8 Rxe8 20 Rxd1 Bxf4, the resulting endgame is level.

12 ... Bc5! 13 Bxf6 gxf6



Despite the pawn deficit and a wrecked kingside, Black retains strong attacking chances thanks to the white king remaining stuck in the centre. If White stays passive, Black will quickly build up a decisive initiative with ... *Rae8-e3*, so the only sensible continuation involves a committal weakening of her kingside. You should not try to remember anything after this point, but I have detailed some marvellously exciting sample variations below for your understanding and enjoyment. Please, indulge me.

14 h4

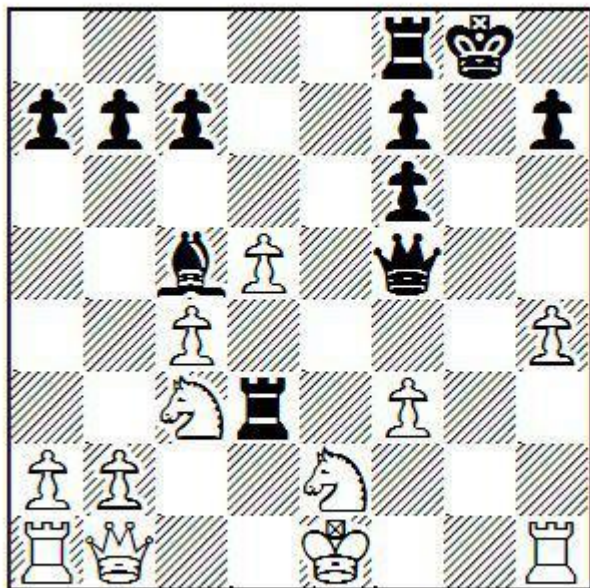
Initially, my computer claimed this position was clearly better for White. But I simply couldn't believe that White could get away with such a reckless opening strategy. Sure enough, after some time, the combination of human and machine was able to prove Black's cause, thanks to a very pleasing sacrifice.

Instead, 14 *Ng3 Rfe8+* 15 *Kf1 Re5* gives Black a lasting initiative. White cannot succeed in blocking the position on the light squares either: 14 *g4?! Bg6* 15 *h4 h6* 16 *h5 Bh7* 17 *Ng3 Rae8+* 18 *Nce4* (or 18 *Nge4 f5!*) 18 ... *Qd6*, and now 19 *Nf5?* fails to 19 ... *Bxf5* 20 *gxf5 Rxe4+* 21 *fxe4 Qf4!* 22 *Qe2 Re8!* with a decisive attack.

14 ... *Rae8!!* 15 *g4 Re3!* 16 *gxf5 Qxf5* 17 *Qb1*

17 Qb3 is met by 17 ... Rd3!. Note 18 Rd1?? Bf2+!! 19 Kxf2 Qxf3+ 20 Kg1 Kh8 mates.

17 ... Rd3!!



Effectively splitting the white army in two. White must now walk a tightrope of 'only moves' in order to escape unharmed.

18 Rf1! Re8 19 Qc2!

Other moves receive the same treatment and are worse.

19 ... Ree3! 20 Rd1! Rxe2+!! 21 Kxe2

The alternatives are clearly inferior: 21 Qxe2?! Re3! or 21 Nxe2? Bb4+ 22 Nc3 Qe5+ 23 Kf2 (or 23 Qe2 Bxc3+ 24 bxc3 Re3) 23 ... Qh2+ 24 Ke1 Re3+ 25 Qe2 Rxe2 mate.

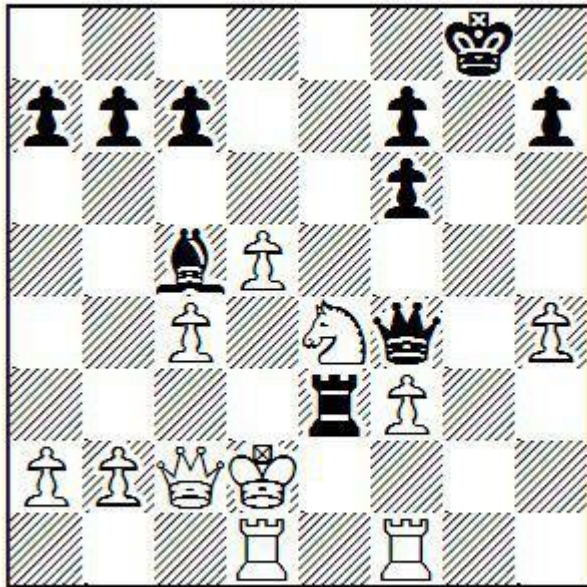
21 ... Qe5+! 22 Ne4

Not 22 Kxd3? Qe3 mate.

22 ... Re3+ 23 Kd2

And not 23 Kf2? Qh2 mate.

23 ... Qf4!!



Threatening deadly discovered checks.

24 Rg1+! Kf8

24 ... Kh8 is not as good, as we will see in the note to move 29.

25 Rg4!

The only way to avoid instant defeat.

25 ... Rd3+!

And, likewise, Black's only saving reply! 25 ... Bb4+?? 26 Kc1! wins for White.

26 Ke1 Bb4+ 27 Nc3

27 Rd2? Qxf3 wins.

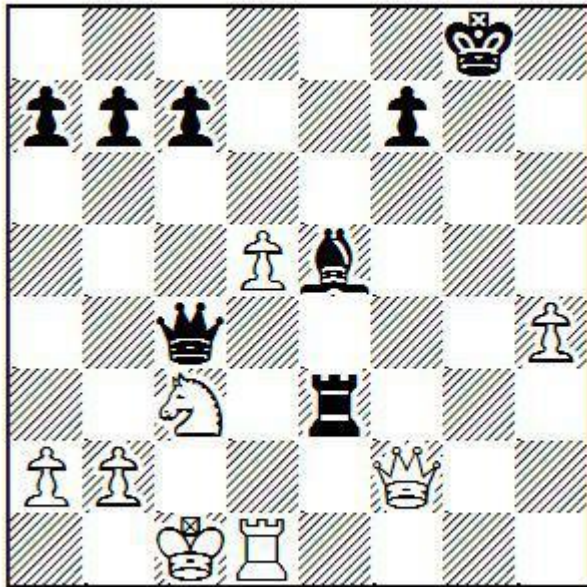
27 ... Re3+!

A powerful switchback.

28 Kd2 Qxf3 29 Kc1

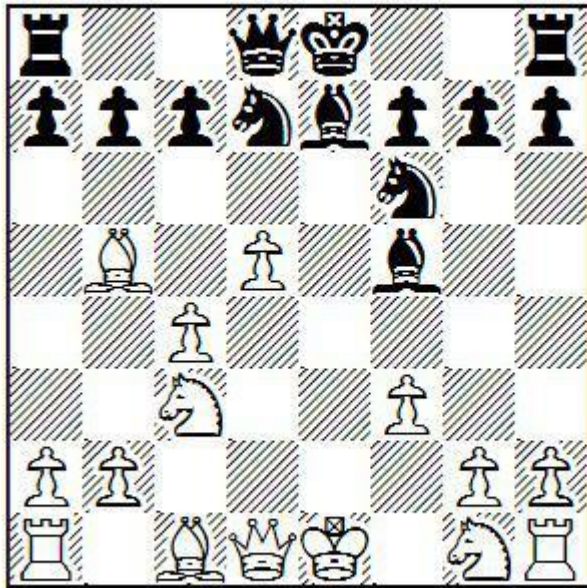
29 Rdg1 Re2+ 30 Kc1 Rxc2+ 31 Kxc2 would win for White if the black king were on h8, but here Black keeps a clear advantage with 31 ... Bxc3 32 bxc3 f5.

29 ... Qxg4 30 Qxh7 Bd6 31 Qh6+ Kg8 32 Qxf6 Be5! 33 Qf2 Qxc4



White has managed to avoid immediate collapse, but her position is clearly worse and she has a difficult fight to keep out the black forces.

A2334: 9 ... Be7!?



Yet another square to develop the bishop. Black's play may seem conservative, but she believes in the long-term potential of her compensation and prefers to deny White the chance to swap off this bishop. The theory on this line is practically non-existent, so the analysis that follows should be considered a first attempt rather than the final word.

10 Nge2

10 g4!? has given White two wins in my database, but it is far too aggressive for the demands of the position: 10 ... Bg6 11 f4 (or 11 h4 h6 12 Nge2 0-0 13 g5, W.Niewiadomski-Gr.Jahnke, correspondence 2001, and now the simple 13 ... Nh5! 14 gxh6 Ne5! would have left White dangerously overextended) 11 ... h6 12 f5?! was a hyper-aggressive approach taken by the world's greatest female player, but after 12 ... Bh7 13 h3 0-0 14 Bf4, J.Polgar-R.Damaso, Oviedo (rapid) 1992, Black could have secured a clear advantage with the standard manoeuvre 14 ... Nb6!, followed by ... a7-a6.

10 ... 0-0 11 Bxd7

White has also tried:

a) 11 Nd4 Bg6 12 0-0 (P.Dächert-R.Niedenthal, Frankfurt 2013), when Black should play 12 ... Nb6!, followed by ... a7-a6, as always.

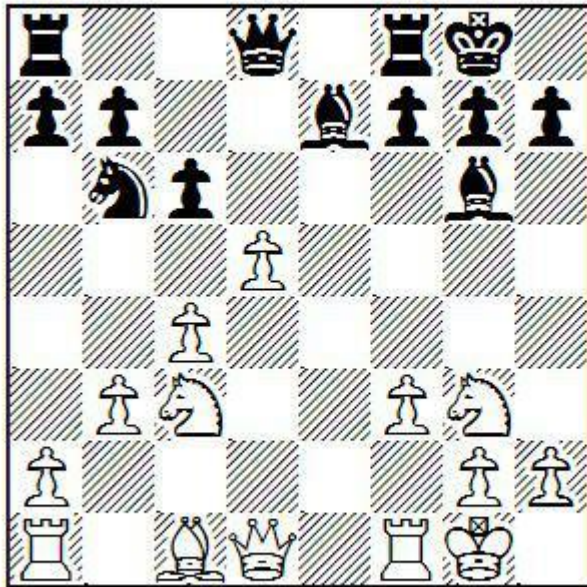
b) 11 0-0 Nb6 12 Ng3 Bg6 13 Qe2 Bb4 14 Na4 c6! was better for Black, though agreed drawn in Ru.Vijayakumar-F.Zulfic, Mount Buller 2005.

c) 11 Ng3 Bg6 12 Bxd7 Qxd7 13 0-0 (A.Karpatchev-K.Busche, Senden 2006) and now 13 ... c6 suggests itself.

11 ... Nxd7

11 ... Qxd7 also gives Black quite respectable compensation, with ... Rfe8 to follow.

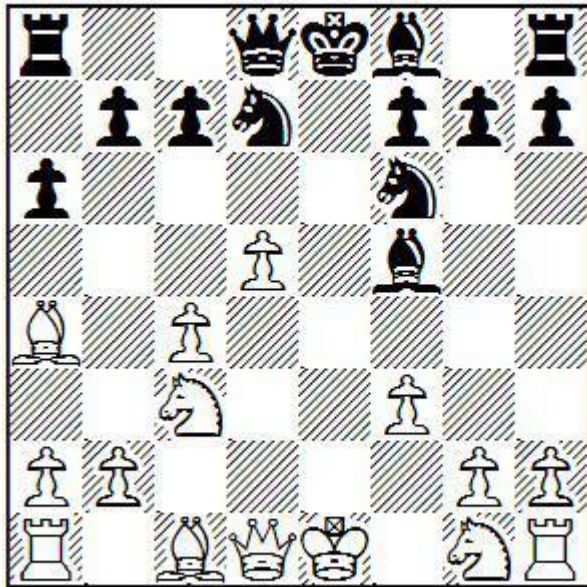
12 0-0 Nb6 13 Ng3 Bg6 14 b3 c6!



This is the key idea behind 9 ... Be7. Black is prepared to swap off White's d5-pawn in order to open up the position for the bishop pair. In particular, Black's dark-squared bishop now has the option to occupy the a1-h8 diagonal.

After 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 Be3 Qc7 17 Qe2 Rfe8 18 Qf2 Nd7! 19 Rad1 Bb4!, Black has sufficient compensation due to the two bishops and more active pieces, and went on to draw in G.R.Evans-P.Aulaskari, correspondence 2005.

A2335: 9 ... a6!? 10 Ba4



The question is whether or not the insertion of ... a7-a6 and Ba4 favours one side or the other. On the one hand, White now has to reckon with ... b7-b5 ideas, and the c4-pawn is a little more vulnerable. On the other, the bishop can be useful in tracking back to b3 or c2 to aid in the defence.

Note that 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Be3 b5! gives Black good compensation.

10 ... Bd6!?

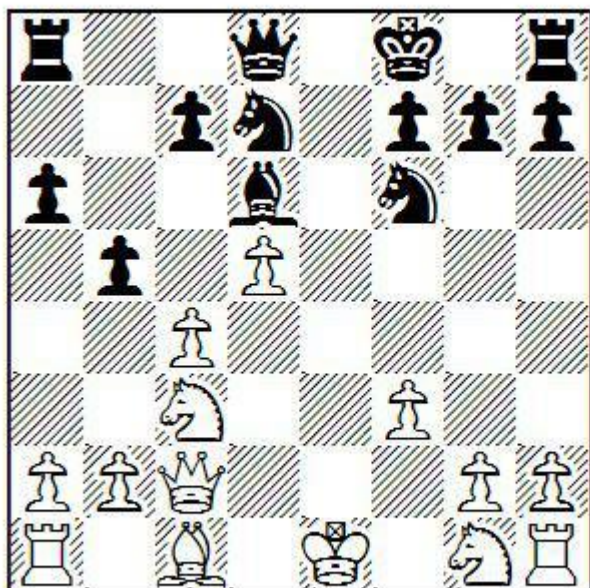
A serious attempt to improve on the 9 ... Bd6 variation. Black has a further choice here, mirroring her options on the ninth move:

a) 10 ... Bc5 is similar to 9 ... Bc5, and 11 Qe2+ Kf8 12 Be3 Qe7 13 Bxd7 Nxd7 14 Bxc5 Qxc5 was roughly equal in N.Guliyev-D.Laylo, San Marino 2006.

b) 10 ... Qe7+!? is a highly original approach: 11 Nge2 (after 11 Qe2?! Bd3! 12 Qxe7+ Bxe7 13 b3 b5!, White's central pawns collapse) 11 ... 0-0-0 12 Bc2 Bg6 13 Bxg6?! (13 Bf4 is better, though after 13 ... Qc5, followed by ... Re8, White is still a way from unravelling) 13 ... hxg6 14 Bg5 was A.Chuiko-D.Saulin, Tula 2000, and now 14 ... Re8!, followed by ... Qb4, would have given Black the advantage.

11 Bg5

Consistent against 9 ... Bd6, but here 11 Qe2+! is better. Then 11 ... Kf8 12 Bc2! demonstrates White's trump from the insertion of ... a7-a6 and Ba4, but 12 ... Bxc2 (alternatively, 12 ... Bg6!? 13 Nh3 Bxc2 is a nice motif, waiting until White's king's knight no longer has access to e2 before hammering down the e-file; after 14 Qxc2 Qe7+ 15 Qe2 Qxe2+ 16 Kxe2 Re8+, Black has some compensation in the endgame, though it isn't quite sufficient in my opinion) 13 Qxc2 b5! demonstrates Black's.

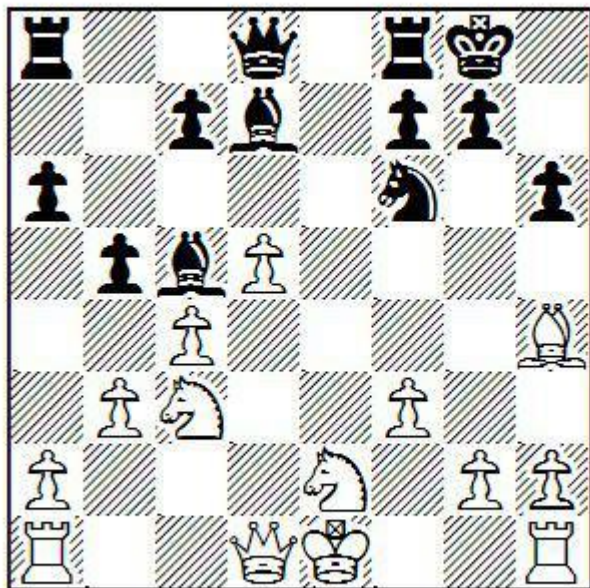


With best play, Black's compensation is probably still insufficient, but the position remains murky. For example, 14 cxb5 axb5 15 Nxb5 Nxd5 (15 ... Bc5!? 16 Nc3 Nb6 is also interesting) 16 Nxd6 Qh4+ 17 g3 Qb4+ 18 Kf2 Qxd6 19 Nh3 h5! and, surprisingly, Black seems to retain an initiative by this somewhat barbaric thrust of her h-pawn towards the white king. Again, I won't claim that Black has full compensation, but handling the white side of this position over the board would certainly come with some risk. Considering the chances of White finding all the best moves to reach this position in the first place, the variation certainly contains some very real practical advantages.

11 ... 0-0

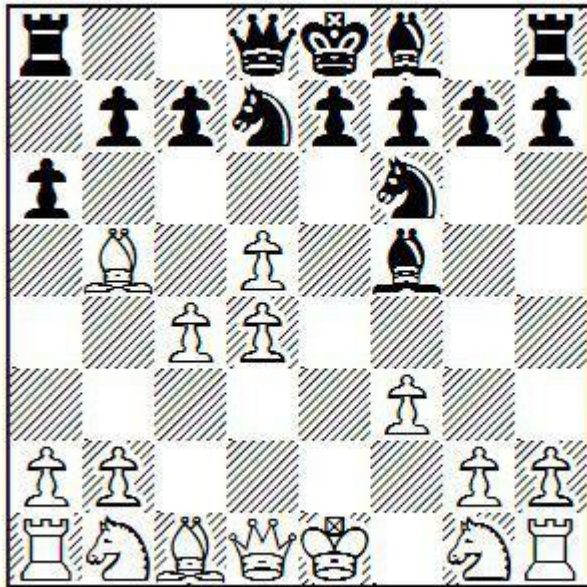
11 ... h6 12 Bxd7+ Bxd7 13 Qe2+ Kf8!, planning to meet any bishop retreat with ... b7-b5, also looks promising.

12 Bxd7 Bxd7 13 Nge2 b5! 14 b3 h6 15 Bh4 Bc5



Black now has an excellent position. White has all sorts of coordination problems and an ongoing question over what to do with her king.

B: 6 ... a6!?



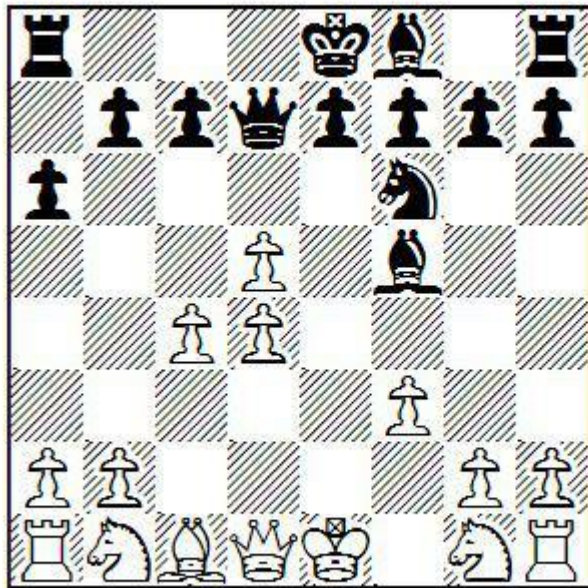
The text is almost as popular as 6 ... e6 in overall practice, although in recent years it has lost a lot of its following. We won't be spending too much time discussing this alternative as I am confident of Black's chances in the main line after 6 ... e6. Nevertheless, there are several good reasons why you might prefer to adopt this variation from time to time: It is straightforward, easy to understand, and requires comparatively little theory to learn. The main idea of playing for a quick ... b7-b5 and sacrificing queenside pawns in Benko Gambit style is visually appealing. Black plays to break up the white structure as quickly as possible, aiming for compensation of a more positional nature against the pawn weaknesses in White's camp.

I have found some interesting ideas that may resurrect the variation from Black's perspective. Should you be interested in pursuing this further, the following analysis will serve as a good base. From the diagram, White has an important choice, with both alternatives scoring roughly the same in practice. I believe capturing the knight to be White's strongest option, though both moves are seen equally often.

B1: 7 Bxd7+

B2: 7 Ba4

B1: 7 Bxd7+ Qxd7



8 Ne2

8 Nc3?! is weaker. After 8 ... e6! 9 dxe6 Qxe6+ 10 Qe2 0-0-0 11 Qxe6+ Bxe6 12 d5 Bf5, Black has excellent compensation in the endgame. Black will continue with ... Bc5 and ... Rhe8, and the natural attempt to stop this with 13 Be3?!, as in M.Sig Vargas-D.Valles Mata, Aragon 2009, can be met by the strong novelty 13 ... Bd3! 14 b3 b5! with a clear advantage to Black.

8 ... e6

8 ... b5!? is interesting: 9 b3 c6 10 dxc6 Qxc6 seems to give Black quite respectable pressure on the queenside, and certainly 11 cxb5? axb5 already favours Black.

9 dxe6 Qxe6 10 b3

10 d5? Qb6! gives Black powerful control over the g1-a7 diagonal.

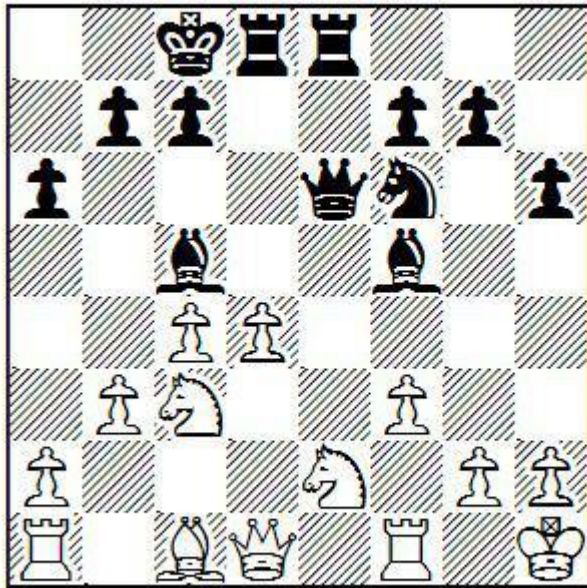
10 ... 0-0-0 11 0-0 Bc5

11 ... h5!? seems rather brutish, though I haven't been able to find a straightforward means for White to deal with the primitive march of the rook pawn down the board. With best play I suspect White must be better, but in practice the position is easier to play for Black.

12 Kh1 Rhe8

12 ... Bxd4? has been tried a few times by strong players, but 13 Nxd4 Qd7 14 Bb2 c5 15 Na3! is close to winning for White, P.Falatowicz-P.Corbat, correspondence 2005.

13 Nbc3 h6



A cunning move, designed to restrict the development of White's 'problem-piece', her c1-bishop. Black has 'almost-sufficient' compensation for the pawn, thanks to her excellent control of the central lines, while White's pieces are still floundering on the back ranks. Importantly, however, White has managed to safeguard her king in the corner, and currently only has the one real weakness on d4. One game continued:

14 Bb2?!

A natural developing move, but inviting Black to infiltrate on the e-file. Three alternatives are preferable:

a) 14 Bf4 g5 15 Bg3 Bg6 leaves White without a clear means to unravel.

b) 14 Nf4 Qc6 15 Nfd5 (Z.Puljek Salai-Bri.Stadler, Croatian Team Championship 1998) 15 ... Nxd5! 16 Nxd5 (16 cxd5?! Qf6!) 16 ... Bd6 gives Black sufficient compensation. She will slowly but surely

prepare to kick away the white knight on d5 via ... c7-c6, with sustained pressure on the white structure.

c) 14 d5 Qe7 15 Ng3 Bg6 16 Bf4 h5!? is practically murky, though White should retain an edge with best play.

14 ... Qe3 15 Qc1 Bb4! 16 Qxe3

If 16 Ng3 Bg6 17 d5 then 17 ... c6! favourably breaks up the centre.

16 ... Rxe3 17 Kg1? Bd3! 18 Rf2? Rde8!

With a clear advantage to Black, A.Mallahi-D.Laylo, Manila 2008.

B2: 7 Ba4 b5!

7 ... e6 8 dxe6 Bxe6 9 c5!, as in Ev.Egorov-D.Saulin, Moscow 2001, shows the difference between this line and 6 ... e6. Without the option of ... c7-c6 to attack White's bishop (as in line A21), Black's best approach is to make a real gambit of it with 9 ... b6! 10 cxb6 cxb6, with some degree of compensation for the pawn.

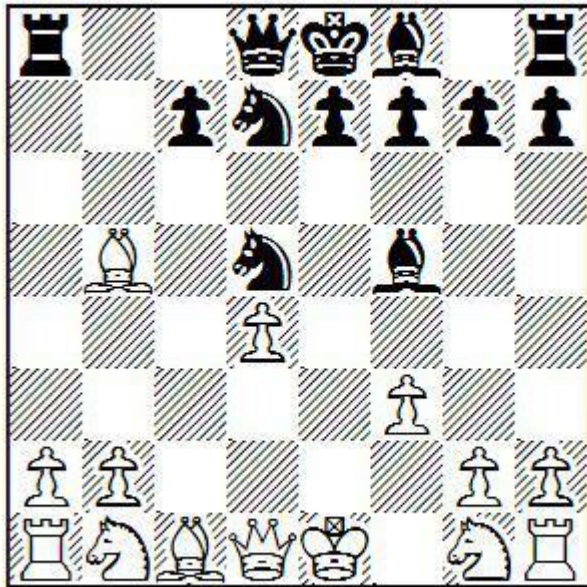
Instead, 9 Nd2 Bb4 10 Qc2?! was a much weaker sequence seen in S.Tiviakov-Pa.Dias, Portuguese Team Championship 2013, when Black could have gained a clear advantage with the typical 10 ... b5! 11 cxb5 0-0, followed by ... Nd5.

8 cxb5 Nxd5

Natural and by far the most popular, though Black has other options as well:

a) 8 ... Nb6!? worked out very well for Black in S.Sulskis-A.Muzychuk, Warsaw (rapid) 2008: 9 Nc3 Nfxd5 10 Nxd5?! (10 bxa6+! is a sterner test: 10 ... Nxa4 11 Qxa4+ Bd7 12 Qa5 Nxc3 13 bxc3 e6 with almost-sufficient compensation; the a6-pawn will fall, but White will have time to finish her development, after which the two bishops and semi-open a-file offer Black a limited amount of play for the pawn) 10 ... Qxd5 11 Bb3 Qxb5 12 Ne2 e6 with equality.

b) 8 ... axb5!? is very rare, but this may be Black's most accurate continuation. After 9 Bxb5 Nxd5,



Black has excellent control over the light squares, with ... Nb4 and ... e7-e6 (or even ... e7-e5) ideas to come. Her compensation is probably not quite sufficient after 10 Ne2, but the position is still complicated with practical chances for both sides. An important point is that 10 Bc6? fails to 10 ... Nb4! with a clear advantage to Black.

9 bxa6

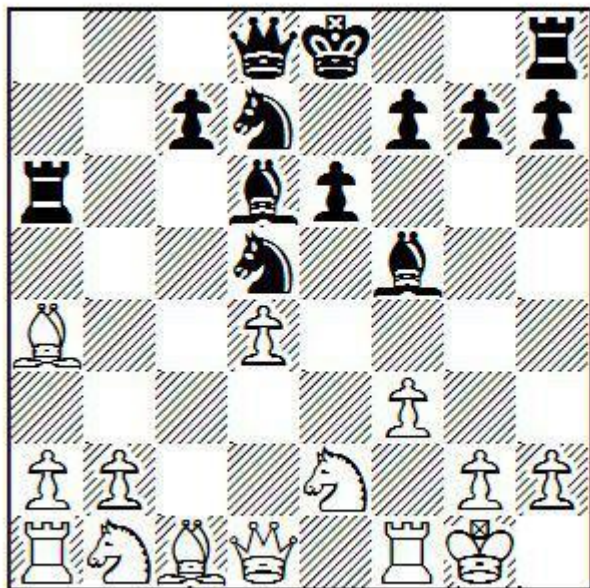
After 9 Ne2 axb5 (9 ... N5b6!? 10 bxa6 Nxa4 11 Qxa4 e6 deserves attention, when the bishop pair provides long-term compensation) 10 Bxb5 Nb4 11 0-0! (11 Na3 c6! slightly favours Black) 11 ... c6 12 Bd2 (the novelty 12 Ba4! Nb6 13 Bb3 e6 14 Nbc3 is slightly better for White, although Black's excellently-placed minor pieces make White's task difficult) 12 ... Nc2 13 Bxc6 Rc8, the complications worked out fine for Black in E.Rozentalis-Kr.Jakubowski, Portuguese Team Championship 2003.

9 ... Rxa6

The energetic 9 ... e5 worked out well for Black in a high-level correspondence game; even so, I don't quite trust it. After 10 Ne2 Bb4+ 11 Nbc3 0-0 12 Bc6?! exd4! 13 Bxd5 dxc3 14 bxc3 Bc5 15 Bxa8 Qxa8, Black was shooting lasers all across the board with her bishops and queen, and won a fine game in A.Scuderi-F.Lukez,

correspondence 1999. But I find it hard to believe in Black's compensation after the natural 12 0-0!.

10 Ne2 e6 11 0-0 Bd6



This is the sort of structure that is typical for the 6 ... a6 variation. White has a safe extra pawn, but Black has long-term pressure on White's queenside and against d4. The outpost on d5 provides the black knights with an excellent vantage point for potential forays into b4, e3 or f4. Yes, a pawn is a pawn, but White will have a hard task making much of her extra one. In short, my opinion is that Black's compensation is sufficient for over-the-board play, though perhaps White might prove an edge in correspondence chess. Nevertheless, I personally am more drawn towards the rare sideline 8 ... axb5!?, which certainly deserves attention.

Chapter Three

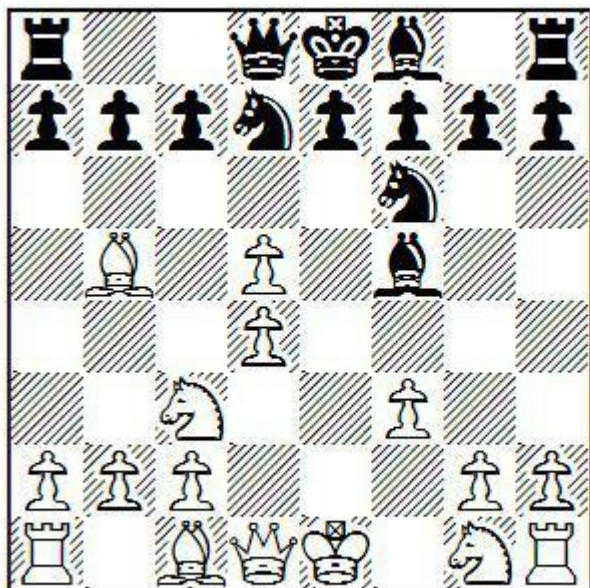
The Melbourne Shuffle

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7

Having discussed the popular Jadoul variation that commences with White's most natural follow-up 6 c4, we turn to some of White's rarer alternatives. These are typically based around the aggressively committal g2-g4. The variation is usually initiated by ...

6 Nc3



... effectively giving back the d-pawn to expedite development. This move isn't as harmless as it appears. Black will have to spend time with ... a7-a6, ... b7-b5 and ... Nb6 to regain the pawn, during which White often embarks on an energetic campaign with Qe2 and g2-g4, putting pressure on Black's cramped minor pieces and vulnerable light squares. On the other hand, whenever White is

tempted into undertaking further operations with her kingside pawns, we should always remember that her king will be susceptible in the long run. So long as Black is prepared to meet White's immediate threats, she can expect excellent counter-chances against the white monarch. A key idea is that if White delays g2-g4 for too long, Black can often answer this thrust with the surprising retreat ... Bf5-c8!, from where the bishop will both be safe and find an active redeployment on b7.

The white side of this variation was championed by several Australian IMs from the fabulous city of Melbourne, and so I have dutifully and affectionately named it 'the Melbourne Shuffle' (a reference you may have to google). These lines can get incredibly sharp for both sides, which is right up our alley. Most importantly, I believe Black is holding her own theoretically as well as practically. So let the dance commence!

Game 5

M.Sadler-D.Smerdon

Amstelveen (rapid) 2012

Matthew is one of England's strongest natural talents of the past few decades, and is especially well known for both his powerful calculation and theoretical preparation. Two years after this game, he exacted sweet revenge by unleashing a move that was shortlisted as one of the top novelties of 2014 by *New in Chess*. It's fair to say, however, that our 3 ... Bg4 system had not received a lot of attention from him in the past!

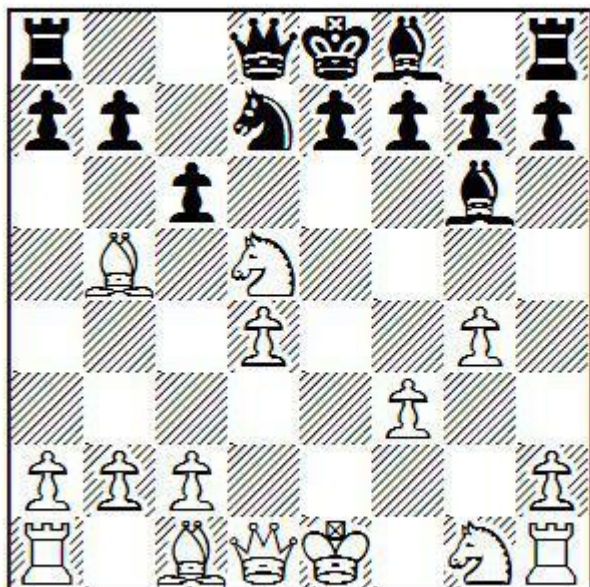
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7

5 ... c6!? is a pretty good 'Elbow' (see that chapter for more details): 6 dxc6 Nxc6 7 Ne2 Qb6 8 Nbc3 e5! 9 dxe5 Rd8 10 Bd2 Nd5 with good compensation.

6 Nc3

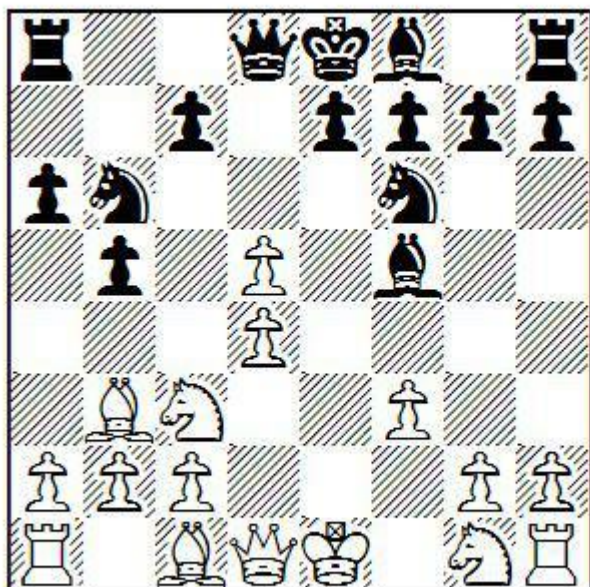
The best attempt to play the Melbourne Shuffle, which is a variation with more poison than you might expect. Black will be able to win back the pawn on d5, but White can unleash some tricky tactics in the meantime.

6 g4!? also requires Black to play a couple of accurate moves, but again, everything is under control: 6 ... Bg6 7 Nc3 Nxd5! 8 Nxd5 c6



9 Bxc6 (or 9 Nf4 cxb5 10 h4 Qc7! 11 c3 e5! with good play) 9 ... bxc6 10 Nf4 e5! 11 dxe5, and now Black can build up a very dangerous attack with the strong novelty 11 ... Bc5!.

6 ... a6 7 Ba4 b5 8 Bb3 Nb6



9 a4

Here 9 g4 Bc8! is worth remembering; or similarly 9 Nge2 Nfxd5 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 11 Ng3 (or 11 0-0 g6!? – see the theory) 11 ... Bc8! with unclear play.

9 ... b4!?

9 ... Nfxd5 is safest, and if 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 11 g4 then 11 ... Be6!? with balanced chances.

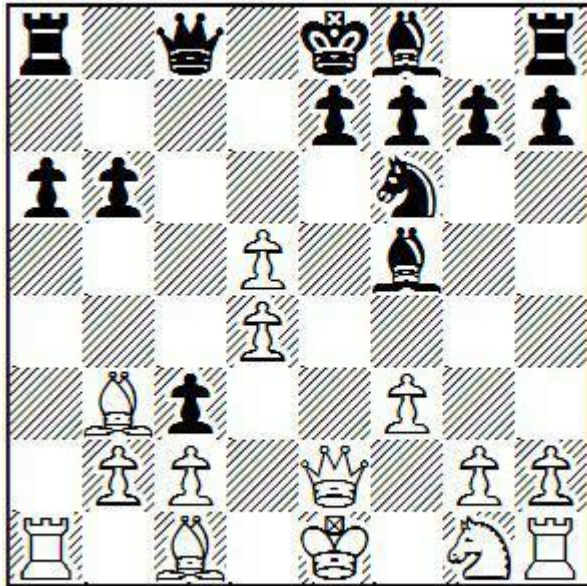
10 a5!

A common idea for White in the Shuffle.

10 ... bxc3 11 axb6 cxb6 12 Qe2

12 bxc3! Nxd5 13 c4 Nf6 14 Ne2 e6 is marginally better for White, although time will tell whether her d4/c4 centre can remain as a strength, or becomes a target.

12 ... Qc8!



A multipurpose move, simultaneously defending two pawns and controlling the white knight's immediate development square on h3.

13 Qe3?

13 Kf2 a5 is balanced. Nonetheless, White should have bravely dared 13 Nh3!, after which Black must really start to focus on getting out the neglected kingside pieces! Then 13 ... Bxh3 14 gxh3 g6! 15 d6 e6 16 d5 Bxd6 17 dxe6 0-0! 18 exf7+ Kg7 reaches a typically

unorthodox position. Black has sacrificed a pawn once again, but, despite the thorn on f7, the compensation is clear. White's pawn structure is in tatters and her king is a long way from a safe haven. I would definitely prefer the dark side in a practical contest.

13 ... Bxc2!!

A bolt from the blue!

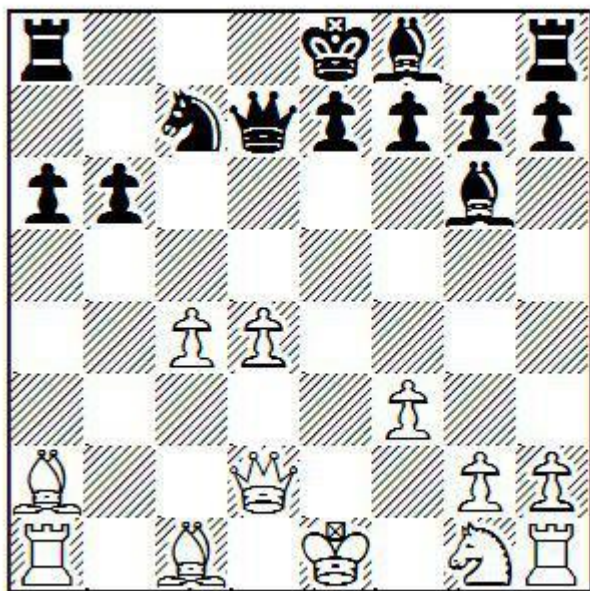
14 Ba2

14 Bxc2? cxb2 15 Ba4+ b5 16 Bxb2 bxa4 wins a pawn, and d5 is about to drop off as well.

14 ... Qd7

14 ... cxb2! 15 Bxb2 Qd7 was more accurate, and clearly better for Black.

15 bxc3 Nxd5 16 Qd2 Bg6 17 c4 Nc7

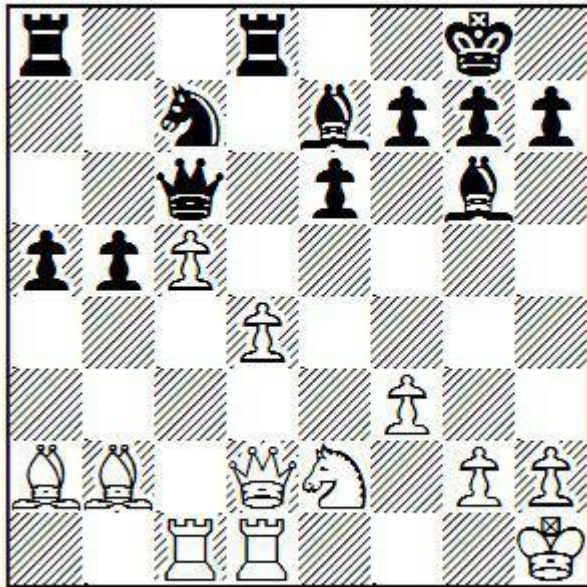


Black has won a pawn. The undeveloped kingside is a small concern in the short term, but objectively the material should count.

18 Ne2 e6 19 0-0 Be7 20 Bb2 0-0 21 Rfd1 Rfd8 22 Rac1 b5!

Breaking apart the white centre and looking to claim the d5-outpost for the black knight.

23 c5 Qc6 24 Kh1 a5!



The pawns begin their relentless march towards promotion.

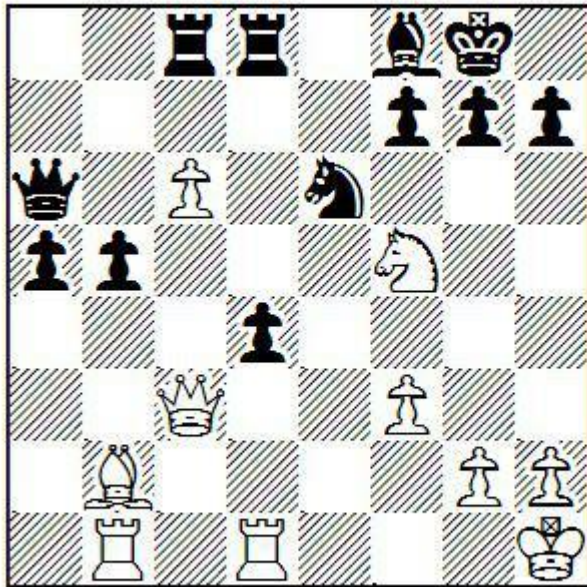
25 d5?!

Desperation, though White was lost in any case.

25 ... exd5?!

I opted for safety over strength. After 25 ... Nxd5! 26 Nd4 Qe8 27 c6 e5!, White's threats are nothing but smoke.

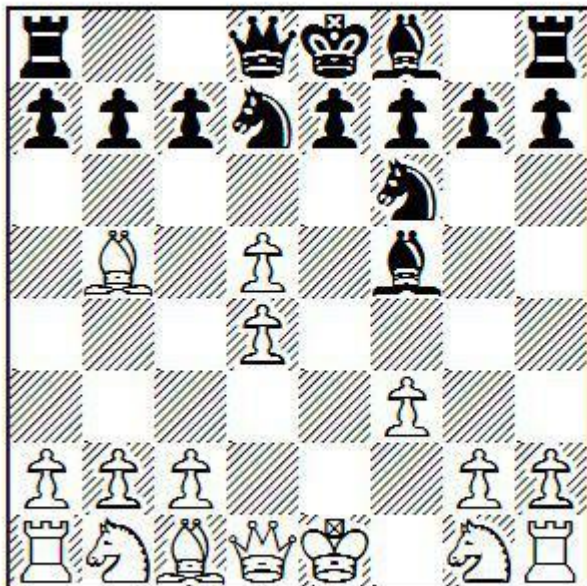
26 Nd4 Qa6 27 c6 Rac8 28 Bb1 Bxb1 29 Rxb1 Ne6 30 Nf5 Bf8 31 Qc3 d4!



Favourably liquidating the last remnants of White's initiative.
 32 Rxd4 Nxd4 33 Nxd4 Rxd4 34 Qxd4 Qxc6 35 h3 a4 36 Qd1 a3 0-1

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ Nbd7

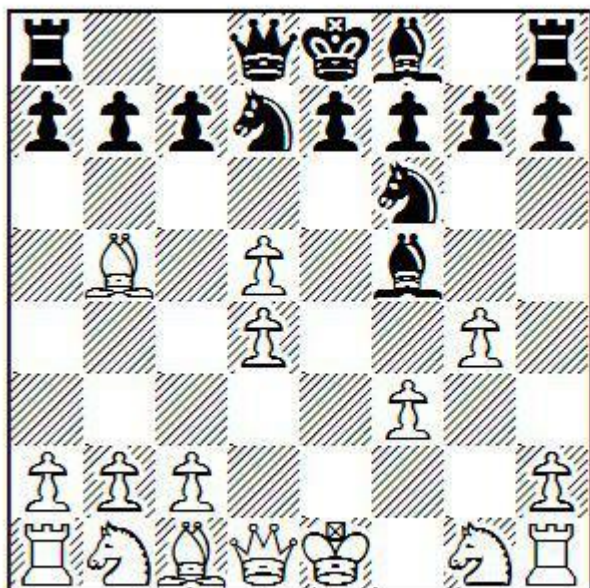


The move-order matters, so this chapter is divided as follows:

A: 6 g4!?

B: 6 Nc3

A: 6 g4!?



An interesting attempt to kick Black's bishop while the path back to c8 is still blocked, hoping to reach a favourable version of the mainstream Melbourne Shuffle (see the note with 7 ... a6 below).

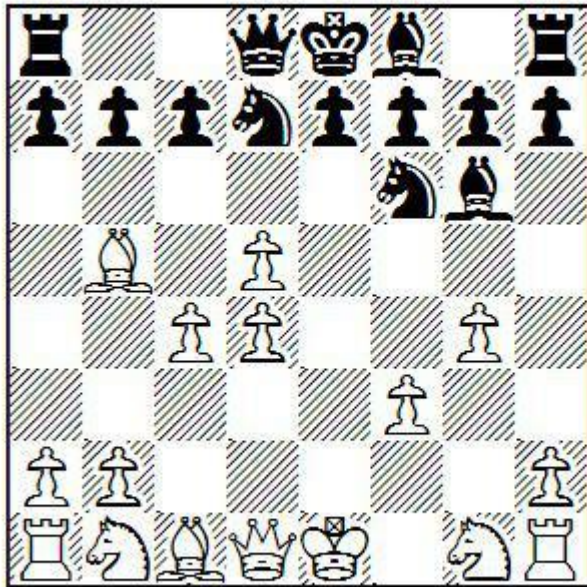
6 ... Bg6 7 Nc3!

The only acceptable continuation. Other moves:

a) 7 h4? h5! 8 g5 Nxd5 was already much better for Black in M.Canfell-H.Bennett, Canberra 2008.

b) 7 f4?! h5! 8 f5 Bh7 9 g5 Nxd5 10 Qxh5 c6 and White's cowboy-styled opening will quickly backfire.

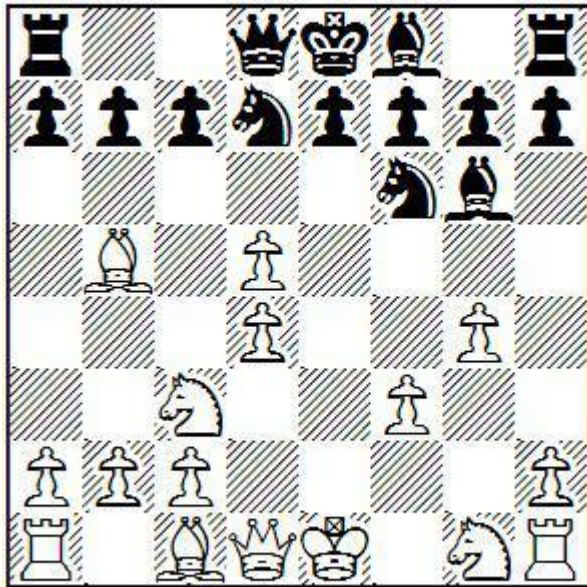
c) 7 c4?! is just too much. Black obtains excellent prospects after both of the usual pawn breaks.



c1) 7 ... e6 8 dxe6 fxe6 9 Ne2 c6 10 Ba4 e5 (10 ... Nxg4!? is also promising, as 11 fxe4? Qh4+ 12 Ng3 Bd6! gives Black an overwhelming attack; 11 0-0 is saner) 11 Nbc3?! exd4 12 Nxd4 Ne5! and Black had a huge advantage against his much-fancied opponent in K.Movsziszian-V.Sanchez Alarcos Galian, La Roda 2009.

c2) 7 ... a6 8 Bxd7+ (8 Ba4 is met by the thematic follow-up 8 ... b5! 9 cxb5 Nxd5 with excellent chances for Black, A.Richard-P.Vandevoort, French Team Championship 1989) 8 ... Qxd7 9 Nc3 e6 10 dxe6 Qxe6+ 11 Qe2, A.Feoktistov-J.Ulko, Moscow 1996, and now 11 ... Bb4! gives Black great compensation, even without queens. Black has the two bishops, open lines and superior development, while White has plenty of pawn weaknesses to worry about.

Returning to 7 Nc3:

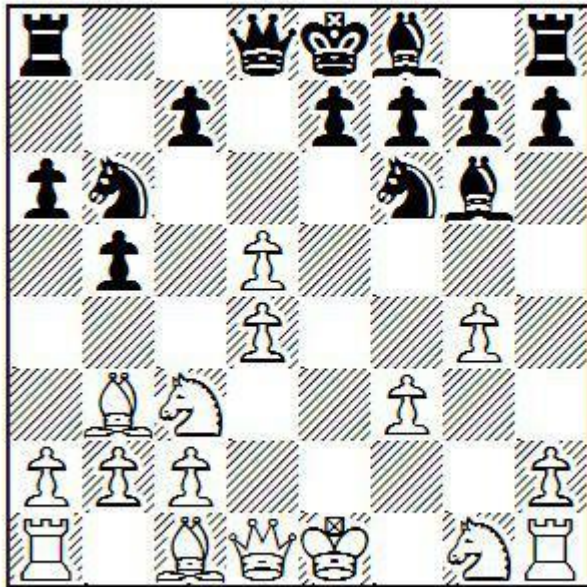


Black now has a pleasant choice. The almost universally-played 7 ... a6 leads to sharp positions with dangers for both sides. However, the Melbourne IM Guy West (one of the experts of the Shuffle for both colours) alerted me to his preference for 7 ... Nxd5!. Further analysis has convinced me that this is Black's best line, and so we will make it our focus.

7 ... Nxd5!

Objectively strongest.

Instead, 7 ... a6 8 Ba4 b5 9 Bb3 Nb6 is by far the most popular (and consistent) continuation. The ensuing variations are quite instructive, illustrating the sort of unusual structures that can result. Highly creative play is demanded from both sides, although one common feature to the lines is that White's king always finds himself lacking a safe harbour.

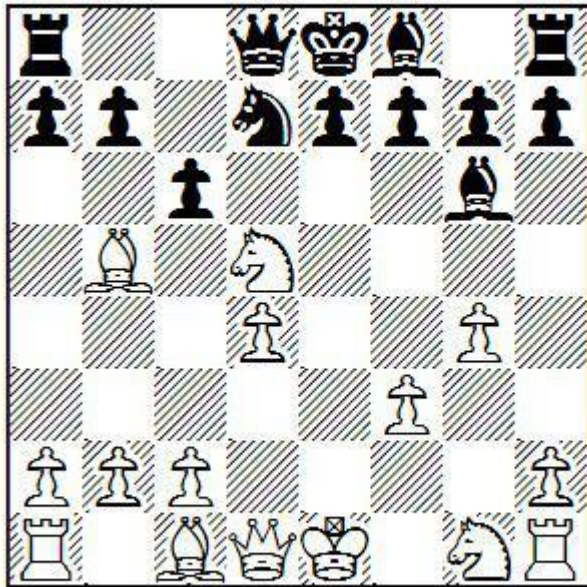


a) 10 a4 Nfxd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Qe2 e6 13 axb5, Ga.Charles-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2005, and here Black should prefer the novelty 13 ... h5! 14 bxa6 c6! with dangerous compensation for the two pawns.

b) 10 f4 b4! 11 f5 bxc3 12 bxc3 Nfxd5 13 fxg6 hxg6 with a complicated position in which White will have to be extremely careful not to find her king dangerously exposed over the coming moves.

c) 10 Qe2 b4! 11 Na4 h5! 12 c4 (or 12 Nxb6 cxb6 13 Qc4 hxg4 14 Qc6+ Nd7 15 Bf4! Rc8! 16 Qb7 Nb8! and Black has everything under control; ... b6-b5 and ... Qd7 will follow) 12 ... bxc3 13 Nxc3 was G.Xie-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2006, where 13 ... Qd7! would already have given Black the advantage.

8 Nxd5 c6



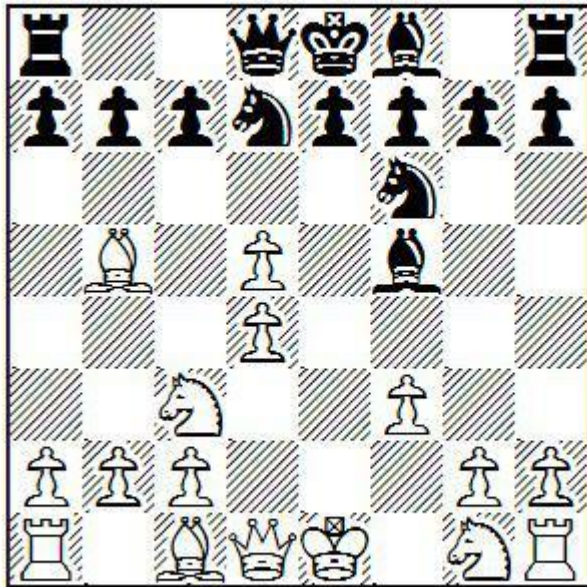
Few games have reached this diagram, but Guy's and my analysis suggests that White's position is far less stable than it first appears:

a) 9 Nf4 cxb5 10 h4 Qc7! 11 c3 e5! 12 h5 exf4 13 hxg6 was F.Dushatskiy-R.Dausch, Ludwigshafen 2007, and here 13 ... fxg6 gives Black a very promising game, as 14 Qe2+ Be7 15 Qxb5 0-0-0! is dangerous for White.

b) 9 h4 h6 10 Nf4 Qa5+! 11 c3 Qxb5 12 Nxg6 fxg6 13 Qe2 Qxe2+ 14 Nxe2 e5! and Black converted his slightly more favourable endgame in J.Obst-G.West, Adelaide 2007.

c) 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nf4 e5! (always a pleasing move to make in the Jadoul) 11 dxe5 was N.Collazo Hidalgo Gato-A.Montalvo, Havana 2003, and here, instead of simply capturing on e5 with equality, the powerful novelty 11 ... Bc5! delivers Black a menacing attack for two measly pawns.

B: 6 Nc3

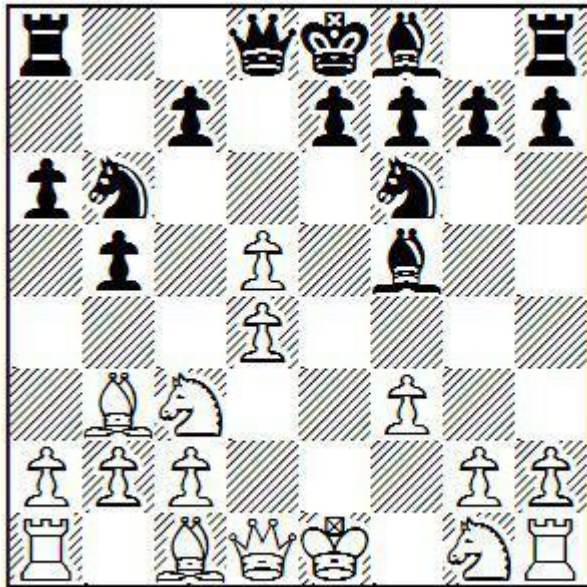


The best route to reach the Melbourne Shuffle.

6 ... a6 7 Ba4

The only consistent continuation. 7 Bc4?! Nb6 equalizes immediately, and 7 Bd3 Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Nb6 9 Nge2 Nfxd5! is fine for Black too. It's worth remembering that Black often prefers to capture first with the f-knight and subsequently with the queen when White plays an early Nc3, as this slows down White's c2-c4 for a useful tempo.

7 ... b5 8 Bb3 Nb6



An important tabiya for this line. White's system may look harmless, but don't be fooled: she is actually embarking on an extremely ambitious approach, neglecting castling and positional considerations in an attempt to blow Black out of the water. White is hoping to exploit Black's queenside extensions with a quick a2-a4, targeting the pawn on b5 or preparing a4-a5 and Bb3-a4+. Moreover, the f5-bishop often finds itself in trouble, either due to g2-g4, Qe2 and f3-f4, or else Ng1-e2-g3 and f3-f4. In fact, quite often in the Melbourne Shuffle, Black prefers to drop her bishop back to c8 when kicked. (It is for this reason that White has often started with 6 g4 to force the bishop back to g6 – though, as we've seen, this move-order has its own problems.)

The key to understanding this variation is to realize that, if Black can survive the initial assault and complete her development, White's early expansions will leave behind several, juicy, long-term weaknesses. So long as Black can take care of both her queen's bishop and her queenside in the short term (often achieved by ... Bf5-c8!), she can look to the middlegame with promise.

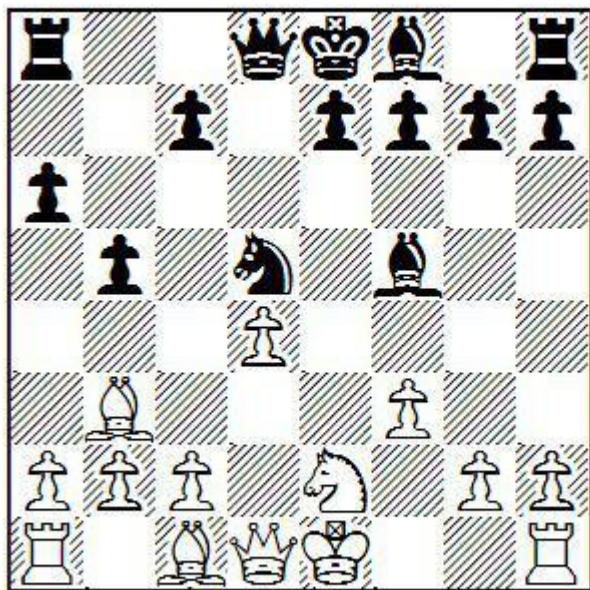
9 Nge2

Alternatively:

a) 9 g4 can now be met by 9 ... Bc8!, after which the bishop avoids any potential difficulties on the kingside, leaving White with no reasonable compensation for her overextended pawns. (9 ... Bg6 transposes 6 g4 Bg6 7 Nc3 a6 8 Ba4 b5 9 Bb3 Nb6 in the notes to line A; Black has many interesting possibilities in these variations, but I am recommending 7 ... Nxd5! here.) For example, 10 a4 b4! 11 Ne4 and now, rather than 11 ... Nbx d5? 12 g5 (which is awkward to meet) or 11 ... Nfx d5?? 12 a5! (which wins a piece), Black should prefer the novelty 11 ... a5!, preventing a4-a5, and allowing her to play ... Nfx d5, followed by healthy development.

b) 9 a4 Nfx d5 (here 9 ... b4!? is Game 5, Sadler-Smerdon) 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 holds up for Black; e.g. 11 Qe2 (now if 11 g4 then 11 ... Be6!?, or 11 Ne2 e6) 11 ... c6! 12 axb5 axb5 13 Rxa8 Qxa8 14 Bxd5 cxd5 15 Qxb5+ Bd7 with sufficient compensation.

9 ... Nfx d5 10 Nxd5 Nxd5



There is one final branch to consider:

B1: 11 0-0

B2: 11 Ng3

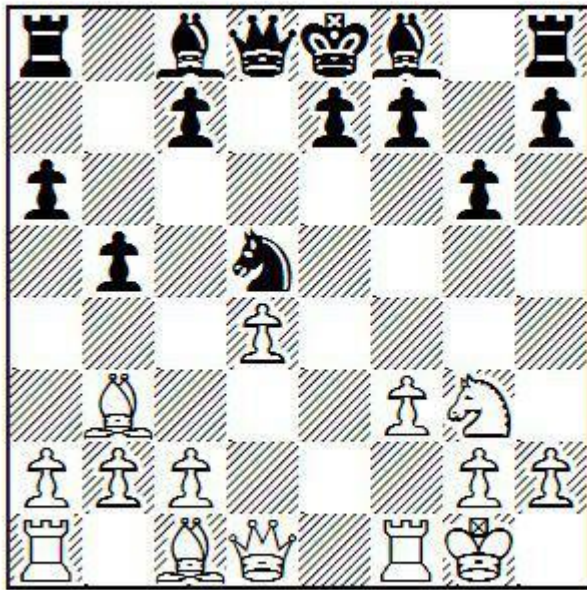
B1: 11 0-0

Here, very rarely for our repertoire, Black should fianchetto on the kingside.

11 ... g6!?

11 ... e6 12 Ng3! Bg6 13 f4! transposes to a position after 11 Ng3 I recommend Black avoids – although, as I discuss below, 13 ... f5!? gives her decent practical chances.

12 Ng3 Bc8!



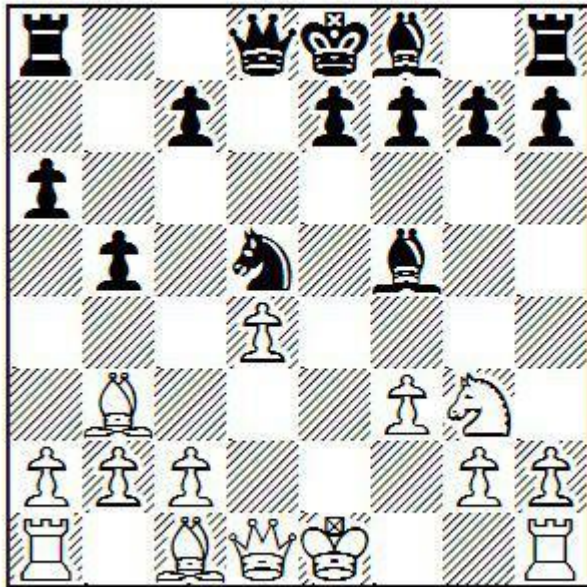
The standard retreat in the Melbourne Shuffle. White has several possibilities, but Black's position is a hard nut to crack:

a) 13 a4 b4 14 Qe1 Bg7 is equal, V.Frolochkin-V.Bukhteeva, St Petersburg 2011.

b) 13 f4 Bg7 14 f5 0-0 and Black is very solid, Al.Zaitsev-D.Saulin, Suvorov 2012.

c) 13 c3 Bg7 14 Re1 0-0 15 Bg5 Re8 (not 15 ... Nf6 16 Qe2 h6??, D.Salinnikov-S.Krivoshey, Minsk 2001, as this should have lost immediately to the surprising 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Qe4! with a double attack on a8 and g6) 16 Bxd5 Qxd5 17 Rxe7 Rxe7 18 Bxe7 Bb7 with sufficient compensation for the pawn, thanks to the two bishops and White's weakened kingside, T.Mahling-P.Corbat, correspondence 2007.

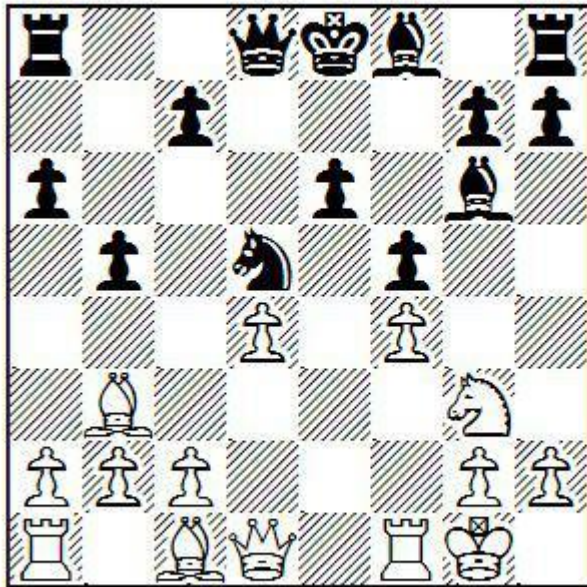
B2: 11 Ng3



11 ... Bc8!

A common retreat in the Melbourne Shuffle.

Instead, 11 ... Bg6?! 12 f4! is definitely a position to avoid in this variation. The early thrust of the f-pawn poses all sorts of problems for Black. After 12 ... e6 13 0-0! White has an advantage, thanks to the looming threat of f4-f5. (But not 13 f5, with which White has scored 100%, because of the novelty 13 ... Bb4+! 14 c3 Nxc3 15 bxc3 Bxc3+ 16 Bd2 Qxd4 17 Rc1 Qe3+! 18 Ne2 Bxd2+ 19 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 20 Kxd2 0-0-0+ 21 Ke3 Bxf5 with a very unclear ending.) Mind you, Black can muddy the waters with the horrendously ugly 13 ... f5!?



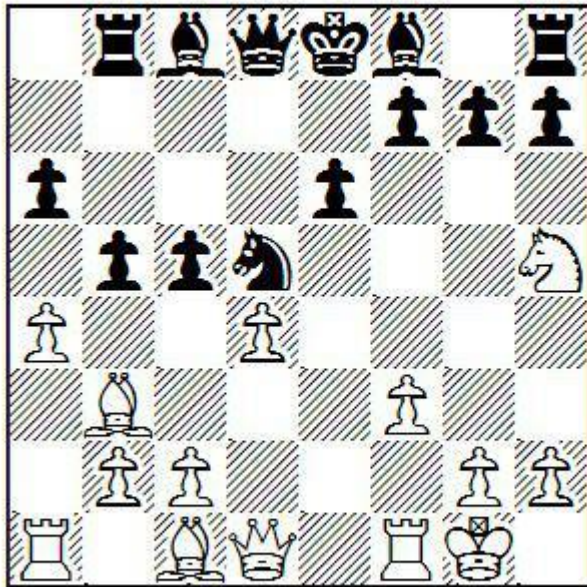
14 Qe2 (14 a4 c5! 15 Qe2 c4! is perfectly satisfactory for Black)
 14 ... Kf7!, as in F.Sideif Sade-I.Badjarani, Azeri Championship, Baku 1997, when Black's position is surprisingly robust; she even retains some annoying compensation after the pawn sacrifice 15 a4 Be7!? 16 axb5 axb5 17 Rxa8 Qxa8 18 Qxb5 Qa7. Still, you'll remember to play 11 ... Bc8, won't you?

12 0-0

14 Bh4 a5 offers equal chances, while 12 Ne4 e6 13 Bg5, T.L.Petrosian-D.Laylo, Chicago 2008, runs into the novelty 13 ... f6!. Black would rather her dark-squared bishop stay on the board for now, given her weakness on c5 and White's weakness on f2.

12 ... e6 13 a4 Rb8

Black can now get on with finishing her development in peace, as the aggressive 14 Nh5? gets hit by 14 ... c5!.



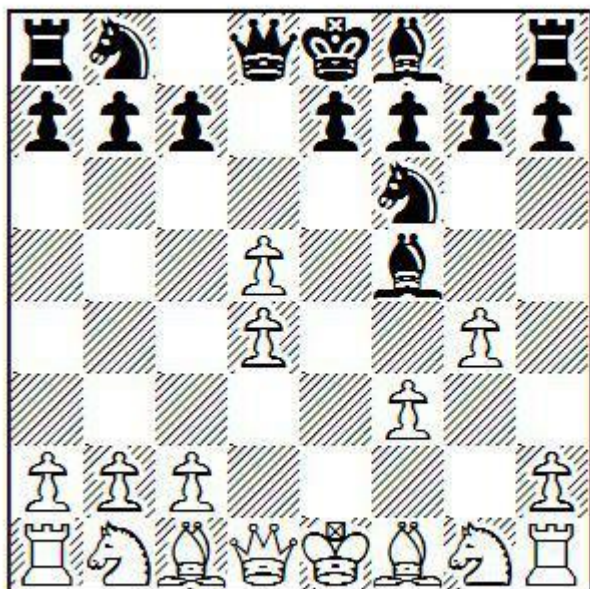
With this excellent central thrust, Black secures a great game with her fair share of the chances. She may still be underdeveloped, but her bishops have a lot of potential diagonals at their disposal, while White's knight on h5 is offside and her kingside permanently weakened.

Chapter Four

The Correspondence Refutation

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 g4!



If there is an absolute refutation of 3 d4 Bg4, it must be this. White's outlandish approach has been rarely seen in over-the-board practice; in fact, I have never faced this variation in literally hundreds of games in this opening, and it is simply omitted in most published texts on 3 ... Bg4. However, this system has been successfully employed within the correspondence community, which speaks to its merit. The variation's development was also furthered by FM Michiel Wind in 2008, who championed the white cause in the German chess magazine *Kaissiber*. (My thanks go to the editor, Stefan Bucker, for providing me with a copy of the magazine and also for useful comments.)

Wind's analysis, coupled with robust testing in subsequent correspondence games and my own extensive analysis, has led me to conclude that this is by far the most serious threat to the viability of the Portuguese complex. In fact, if computers ever manage to solve the game of chess, I have a feeling that this line may well be recorded as the ultimate refutation of 3 ... Bg4.

Okay, I've painted a rather bleak picture of Black's chances in that brutally honest introduction. But before you ask your bookstore for a refund, let's look at the flipside of the equation. First of all, like so many computer-inspired variations, the strength of White's approach comes from precise, concrete lines, many of which defy human logic. White's early g2-g4 thrust means that she is unlikely to be able to castle safely, not just in the near future, but most probably not at all. Additionally, at several branches of the analysis White will be forced to neglect her development further in order to justify her greed; in some cases, White's first ten or more moves will all be pawn moves – and this will be absolutely necessary in order for her to stay in the game!

My point is that White's extreme disregard for classical opening principles in the name of grabbing material leaves her position hanging by a thread – although, with best play, it does indeed appear to hold on. Black has several, attractive, dangerous options at different moves, and while White's position seems to be robust against each with best play, there are simply too many lines for a human to memorize. Inaccuracies by Black lead to positions where she has insufficient, but tricky, compensation. Inaccuracies by White are often fatal.

Keep this in mind as you go through the chapter. Remembering the infrequency of this variation in tournament play, I would recommend not spending too much time committing the analysis to memory; instead, it is more important to simply be aware that the variation exists, and to familiarize yourself with Black's common ideas.

I don't want this to read as a dismissal or an excuse; in correspondence chess, for example, I believe that White's chances of winning with this variation are high, which is reflected by its popularity in this genre. However, in an over-the-board human contest, White has to overcome almost insurmountable practical difficulties in order to keep her position together. Even if your opponent has spent several hours delving into deep computer analysis, I can't imagine her being able to memorize all of the

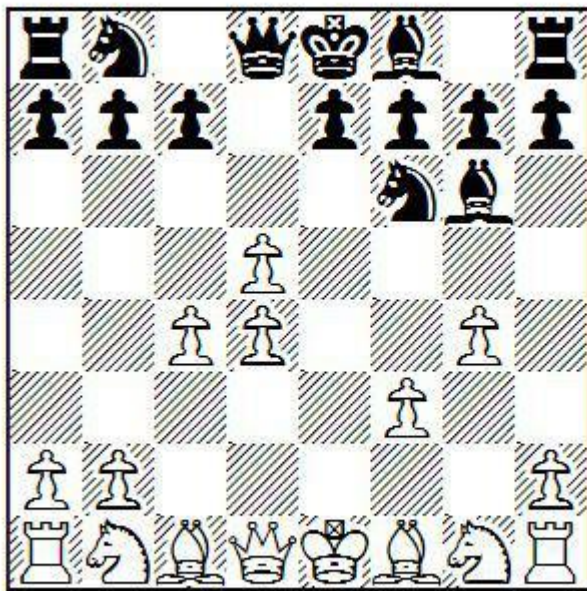
variations necessary to nurse a theoretical advantage to fruition – Black simply has too many possibilities that give her excellent play and the typical ‘almost-sufficient compensation’.

From a practical perspective, if I ever do face 5 g4, I am confident of being able to bamboozle an opponent over the board in the crazy, razor-sharp tactics that emerge, in which White really needs to walk on a knife’s edge in order to keep an advantage. On the other hand, Black’s position sure is a lot more fun!

5 ... Bg6

5 ... Bd7!? is covered in the theory and leads to less explored positions, though objectively White can keep a sound advantage with precise play.

6 c4!



In the few encounters featuring this variation, Black has usually continued with 6 ... e6 and we will take this as the main line; however, the rarely played 6 ... c6!? comes into consideration too (this option is in fact so rare that one of our illustrative games is an all-engine match I ran on my home computer!). Nevertheless, despite its infrequency in practice, the Correspondence deserves our attention and careful study. Understand these positions and you can feel confident that you will be better able to navigate the murky

waters than your opponents.

Game 6

Iv. Popov-D. Laylo

Quezon City 2014

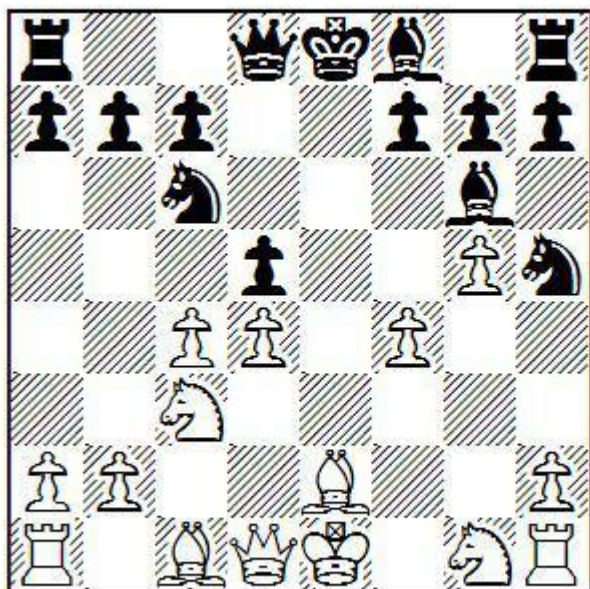
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 g4! Bg6 6 c4!

Outrageous – but strong! This is definitely the most dangerous system for Black to face. When all that can be said and written about chess is done (hopefully not in my lifetime!), I suspect that this position will be given somewhere as the objectively best response to Black's 3 ... Bg4. Subjectively, on the other hand, Black has excellent practical chances against this system, as White has irreparably damaged her kingside defences and must continue to press forward to justify her approach.

6 ... e6

6 ... c6!? is definitely worthy of consideration and cuts down on the memory time. Furthermore, it may even be objectively best, although the text is trickier and gives White more chances to go wrong. See the theory for more information.

7 Nc3! exd5 8 g5! Nh5 9 f4! Nc6 10 Be2!

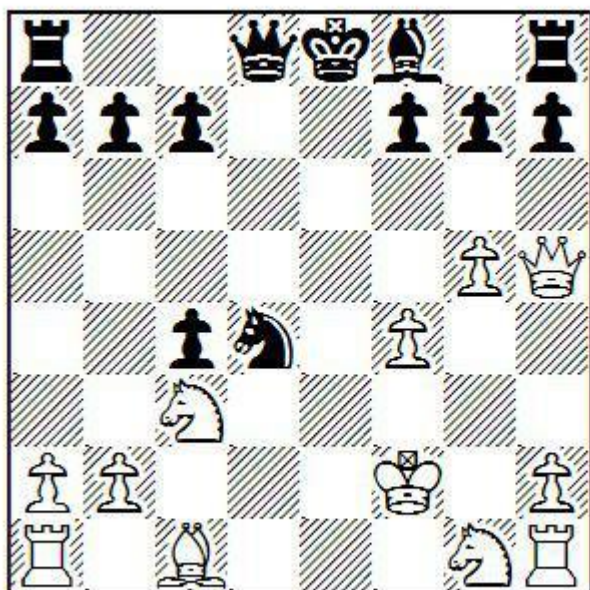


Popov plays very accurately; White's alternatives over the past few moves leave Black with excellent prospects at worst (for example, 10 Nxd5 Ne7! offers good compensation). Black must now sacrifice a piece, but the game is very much still alive.

10 ... dxc4 11 Bxh5 Bxh5

11 ... Bd3!? 12 Nf3 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qxd4 is tricky. White needs to find the sequence 14 Qf3! Bc5 15 Bd2! Bc2! 16 Ne2 Qe4 17 Rc1! 0-0 18 Qxe4 Bxe4 19 Rxc4 Bxh1 20 Rxc5 with a clear advantage in the endgame.

12 Qxh5 Nxd4 13 Kf2!



The last piece of the puzzle required to secure a clear advantage. Black has play, but not enough to justify the sacrificed material. Instead, 13 Qd1? Bc5! is very dangerous for White.

13 ... g6 14 Qd1 Bg7 15 Qa4+?

15 Nf3! 0-0 16 Nxd4 Bxd4+ 17 Kg3 was correct; White's king is surprisingly safe on g3.

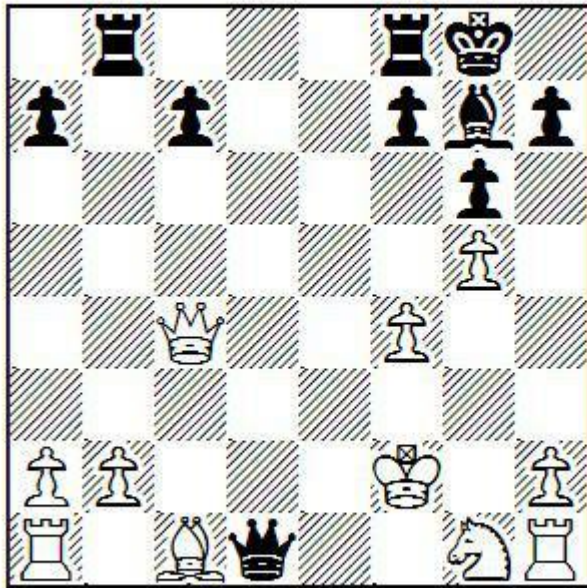
15 ... b5?

Missing a great chance: 15 ... c6! 16 Qxc4 Qb6!, followed by ... 0-0-0, leaves Black with a decent initiative. The rooks will sit nicely on e8 and d8, holding up White's coordination while her king struggles to find a genuinely safe home.

16 Nxb5 0-0 17 Qxc4 Nxb5

17 ... Nf5! was more resilient, making use of the nice outpost on f5. For example, 18 Nf3 c6 19 Na3 (not 19 Qxc6?? Rc8! and wins) 19 ... Re8 with good practical chances.

18 Qxb5 Rb8 19 Qc4 Qd1



20 Qe2!

Accurate to the end! Popov again finds the only move to keep an advantage, but it's good enough, whereas 20 Kg2 Qg4+ 21 Kf2 c5! 22 Nf3 Bd4+! 23 Nxd4 Qh4+ leads to a draw by perpetual check.

20 ... Qd4+

20 ... Rbd8! 21 Qxd1 Rxd1 22 Kg2 Re8 23 Nh3 Rxh1 24 Kxh1 Re1+ 25 Kg2 Bd4 would have forced White to show a fair amount of technique to claim the full point; an ending of rook vs. knight and bishop, but few pawns, is likely.

21 Be3 Qe4 22 Qf3 Rxb2+ 23 Ne2

The white pieces finally begin to emerge from the first rank.

23 ... Qe6 24 Rhb1 Rfb8 25 Rxb2 Rxb2 26 Rd1 h5 27 gxh6 Bf6 28 f5 gxf5 29 Rg1+ Kh7 30 Qa8! Bh4+ 31 Kf1 Rb1+ 32 Bc1 1-0

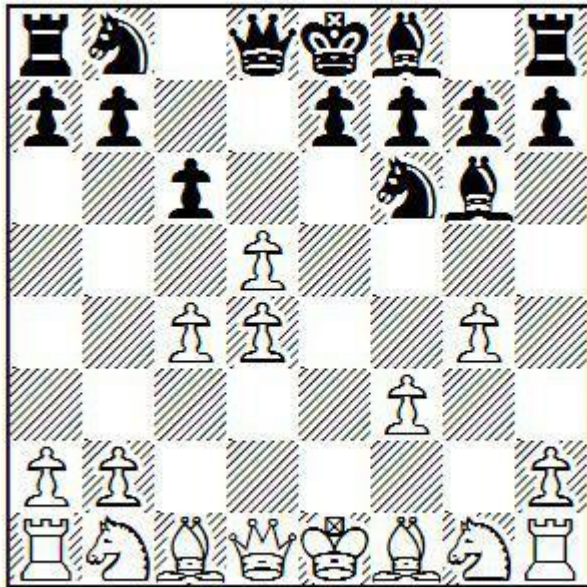
inaccuracy are far direr for White than Black here. I am aware that it sounds like I am already offering excuses for the unsoundness of Black's position, and to some extent that is true. But the point I'm trying to make is that we should remember that our opening is typically designed to pressurize fallible opponents, and so some degree of 'gambling' is practically acceptable.

Nonetheless, in the following engine battle, White doesn't have the excuse of intimidation to explain the failure to secure the full point. It was quite an interesting fight to observe from the comfort of my sofa: although White naturally avoided all of the lurking tactical tricks, the resourcefulness of Black's position was demonstrated time and again over the course of the four-hour silicon contest. It is also somehow reassuring to discover that even the world's strongest engines can still perform terribly in rook endgames!

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5 5 g4 Bg6

If you really want to wade into the unknown, 5 ... Bd7!? is possible. The critical line continues 6 c4 (6 Nc3?! allows 6 ... e6!) 6 ... c6! 7 dxc6 Nxc6 (threatening ... e7-e5) 8 d5! Na5! 9 b4 e6! 10 bxa5 Nxd5! 11 cxd5 Qh4+ with an outlandishly speculative (if ultimately unsound) attack for the two pieces. See the theory for further details.

6 c4 c6!?



Definitely worthy of more attention than it has received in the past.

7 Nc3!

7 dxc6?! Nxc6 8 d5 Ne5 gives Black sufficient compensation.

7 ... cxd5 8 g5 Nfd7 9 cxd5!

An important move, although as yet unplayed. Instead, 9 Nxd5 e6! 10 Nc3 h6! is already beginning to favour Black, whose pieces will rush out with great alacrity.

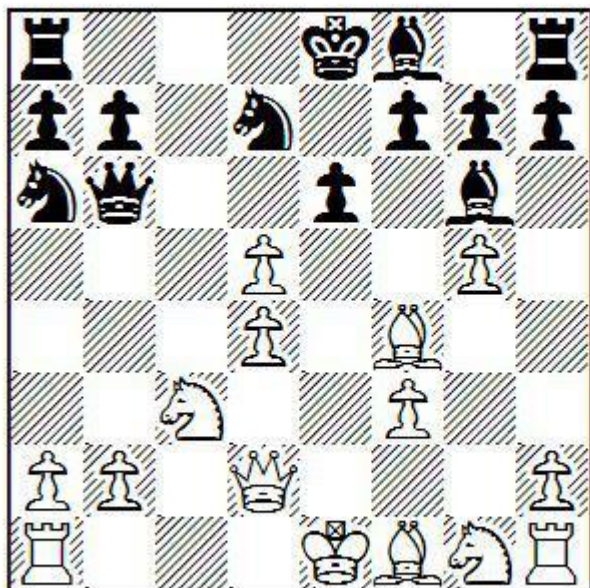
9 ... Na6!

With her last move, Black offers another pawn to invite White to surrender the two bishops. Actually, Black's main problem is not the pawn deficit – if she can successfully develop her dark-squared bishop and get her king to safety, she can begin to target White's own vulnerable pawns and exposed king. But this is easier said than done. The two options at Black's disposal are the typical ... e7-e6 exchange, which will leave her saddled with her own weak pawn on e6, or a fianchetto via ... Bf5 and ... g7-g6, possibly exchanging off the white g-pawn with ... h7-h6.

10 Bf4!

10 Qb3 Qb6! gives Black enduring endgame compensation, while 10 Qa4 should be met by 10 ... e6!, sacrificing a second pawn on a6, with excellent prospects.

10 ... Qb6 11 Qd2 e6!



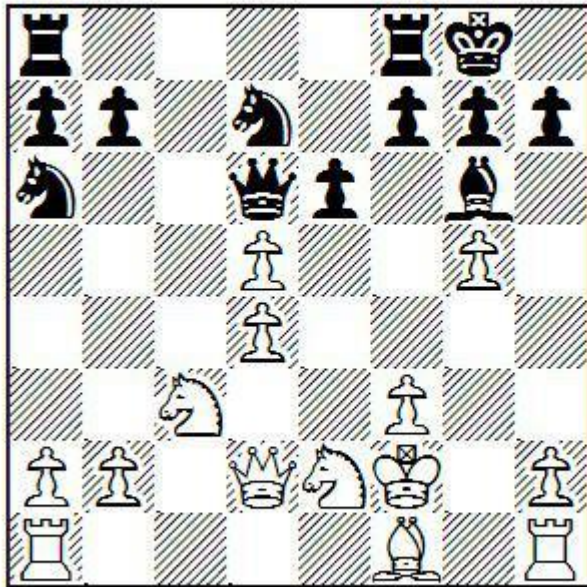
Allowing White to cash in on her extra pawn, but at the same time opening the way for the last of Black's pieces to enter the game.

12 Kf2!

12 a3 was tried in another computer battle in my living room. After the natural sequence 12 ... Bd6 13 Nge2 0-0 14 h4 Rad8 15 h5 Bf5 16 Bxd6 Qxd6, White sensibly opted to trade queens, though Black's position remained sound even then: 17 Qf4 Qxf4 18 Nxf4 Nc7 19 Rd1 Nb6! 20 dxe6 Nxe6 21 Nxe6 fxe6 22 h6 Bc2 23 Rd2 Bg6 24 Bh3 e5! and Black eventually held the worse side of a draw in *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, Shootout (29 Ply) 2015.

That White might want to control the b4-square is borne out by several sidelines in this variation, such as 12 Bd3? Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Qxb2! 14 Rb1 Nb4! with a clear advantage to Black.

12 ... Bd6 13 Nge2 0-0 14 Bxd6 Qxd6



Black has a number of positional pluses to compensate for the pawn. White's doubled d-pawns are chronically weak, and seeking to eliminate one of them by capturing on e6 means allowing Black's rook to line against White's king on the semi-open f-file. Meanwhile, there are several juicy outposts for Black's minor pieces, such as on f5 and d5.

Fortunately for White, the concrete nature of the position allows for an accurate sequence to maintain an advantage, though any deviation from this narrow path could spell disaster. Black threatens ... Nc7, followed by the inevitable favourable opening of the f-file for the rook on f8.

15 h4!

Alternatively:

a) 15 Qf4? e5! 16 Qd2 f6! gives Black the advantage.

b) 15 Nf4?! Nc7! keeps the pressure on d5 and encourages the capture on e6. After 16 dxe6 Nxe6 17 Nxe6 fxe6! 18 Rd1 Nb6!, Black is better.

c) 15 Ng3 Nc7! also offers good compensation.

15 ... Bf5 16 h5

Instead:

a) 16 dxe6?! fxe6 undoubtedly favours Black, who can easily increase the pressure against the white pawns on d4 and f3.

b) 16 Ng3 Nc7! 17 Nxf5 exf5 18 Bd3 g6 19 h5 Nb6! provides counterplay. Black will be able to handle any threats on the h-file by transferring a rook to her second rank, while her knights are eagerly eyeing up d5.

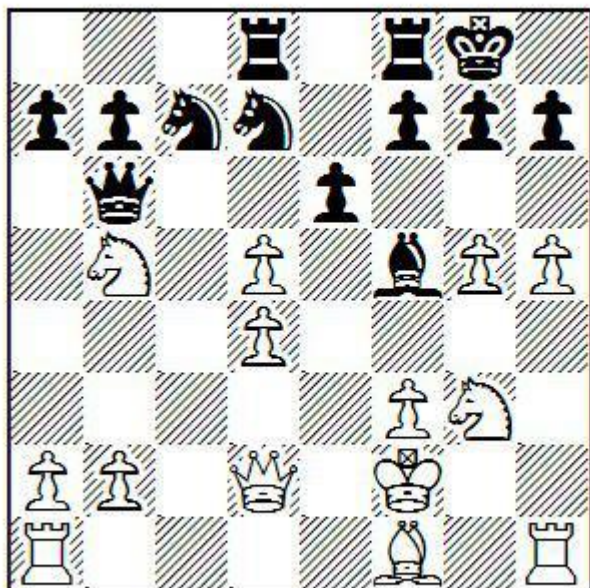
16 ... Rad8

16 ... Nb6!? was possible, although it would be a brave player indeed who was willing to go in for the position after 17 h6! g6 18 Qf4 Qb4 19 Bh3 Rae8!.

17 Nb5!

17 Qf4?! can now be answered by 17 ... Qb6! 18 h6 g6!, targeting b2 and intending to break free with ... f7-f6. Black has the initiative.

17 ... Qb6 18 Ng3 Nc7!



An excellent move. White was threatening to close the door on the position with d5-d6. The trade of Black's offside steed is definitely an improvement.

19 Nxc7 Qxc7 20 Re1

After 20 Nxf5 exf5 21 Bd3 Nb6!, Black is just in time to organize sufficient counterplay. For example, 22 Bxf5 Rxd5 23 Be4 Nc4! 24 Rac1! Nxd2 25 Rxc7 Nxe4+ 26 fxe4 Rxd4 with a likely draw.

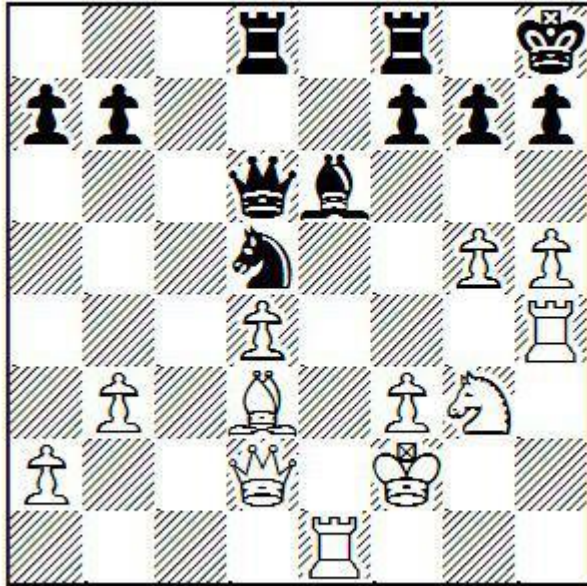
20 ... Kh8

The immediate 20 ... Nb6 21 dxe6 Bxe6 22 b3! Nd5 23 Bc4 favours White, so first Black makes a semi-useful waiting move.

21 Rh4!

21 dxe6 Bxe6 22 Bd3 Qb6! is annoying.

21 ... Nb6 22 dxe6 Bxe6 23 b3 Qd6 24 Bd3 Nd5

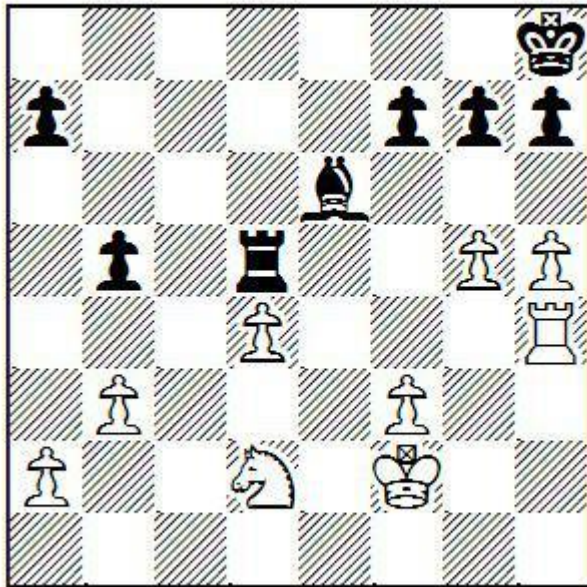


White has escaped from the opening without falling for any tactical traps, as one might expect from a computer. In fact, if a human opponent of yours manages to get this far on their own, I dare say you can consider yourself extremely unlucky! Nevertheless, even despite this evaluation, White faces a difficult job: the extra pawn is firmly blockaded, while her overextended kingside has left a couple of holes that require constant attention. Overall, White must be better, but these positional defects mean that a successful conversion is a long way off. Over the next few moves, the engines begin to realize this fact too.

25 Ne4 Qb4 26 Bc4 b5! 27 Bxd5 Qxd2+ 28 Nxd2 Rxd5 29 Re5

29 Rg1? Rc8! creates dangerous counterplay.

29 ... Rfd8! 30 Rxd5 Rxd5



White's pawn weaknesses on all sides of the board are a serious hindrance to her ambitions of making progress. On the other hand, it takes time to capture pawns, and Black has little time to spare given the terribly passive position of her king. I suspect the ending is winning for White with best play, so I find it interesting (and a little comforting) that strong engines struggle to convert the point. The rest of the game is of course irrelevant to this book, but the endgame is still somewhat instructive. And after all, you want your money's worth, right?

31 Nf1

31 g6!? was an interesting try, though after 31 ... Kg8!, White will most likely have to give up a pawn on the kingside anyway.

31 ... h6

The natural 31 ... Rxg5 leads to the forcing sequence 32 Ne3 g6 33 h6 Kg8 34 d5! Bd7 35 f4 Rh5 36 Rxh5 gxh5 37 Kg3! f6 38 Kh4 Kf7 39 Kxh5 Ke7 40 b4!.

32 gxh6

After 32 Ne3, Black should retreat the rook to d7 despite what your engine will try to tell you, as 32 ... hxg5? 33 Nxd5 gxh4 34 Ne7! leads to a winning endgame for White. A full analysis is beyond the scope of our interest, but here is a plausible continuation to give you

an idea: 34 ... g6 35 d5 Bh3 36 Nc6 Kg7 37 Nxa7 Bd7 38 Kg2 gxh5 39 Nc6 Kf8 40 a4 bxa4 41 bxa4 Bc8 42 a5 Ke8 43 Nb4 Kd7 44 a6 Kd6 45 a7 Bb7 46 Kh3 and wins.

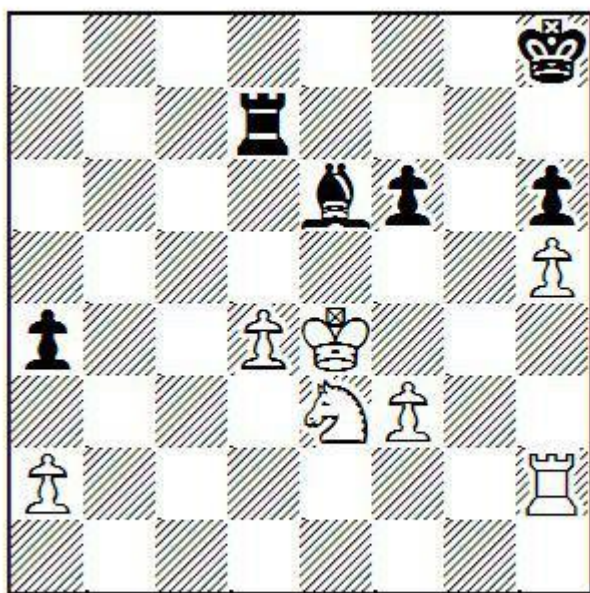
32 ... gxh6 33 Ne3 Rd7 34 Ke2 a5

34 ... Kg7 35 Kd3 Kf6 seems like a logical alternative, but after 36 Rh1, White's rook will enter the game with devastating effect.

35 Kd3 a4

Following the old maxim: "When behind, swap pawns, not pieces."

36 bxa4 bxa4 37 Rh2 f6 38 Ke4



38 ... Re7?

38 ... Bf7! offered survival chances; e.g., 39 d5 f5+! 40 Kxf5 (or 40 Ke5 f4!) 40 ... Bxd5 41 Nxd5 Rxd5+ 42 Ke6 Rb5 and the fact that White has two rook's pawns and an f-pawn, combined with a passive rook on h2 and Black's ability to check from the 'long' side, make the win extremely unlikely. In fact, I believe the position is drawn; e.g. 43 f4 a3 44 Rh3 Rb6+ 45 Kf5 Rb5+ 46 Kg4 Ra5 47 Rd3 Kg7 48 Rd7+ Kg8 49 f5 Ra4+ 50 Kg3 Kf8 with a draw.

39 Nd5!

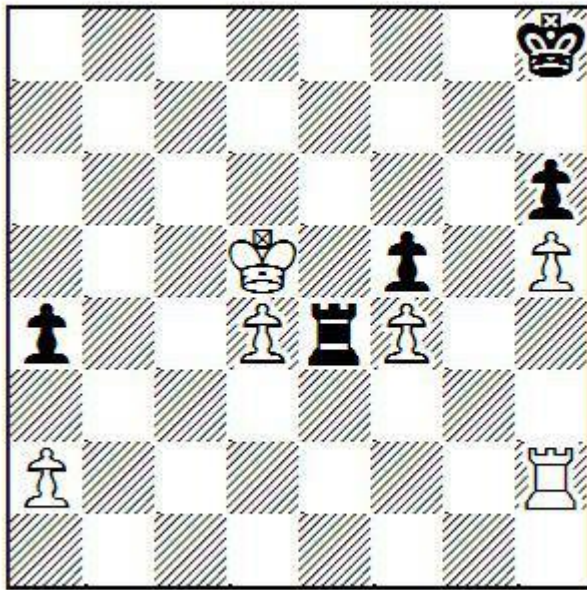
Tempting, but gambling with another famous chess epigram: "All rook endgames are drawn"! In any case, White would soon have had

to exchange the minor pieces in order to make any progress. Not 39 d5? Bxd5+! and Black wins a pawn.

39 ... f5+ 40 Ke5 Bxd5+ 41 Kxd5 Re3 42 f4?!

Not the cleanest. 42 Rc2! Rxf3 (42 ... Rd3 43 f4 Kg7 44 Ke5 wins trivially) 43 Kc6 Kg7 44 d5 Kf7 45 d6 Ke8 46 Kc7 Rd3 47 Re2+ Kf7 48 d7 Rc3+ 49 Kd8 is easily winning.

42 ... Re4



43 Kd6??

A baffling blunder, proving the well-accepted wisdom of computer chess that, even today, engines can still struggle in rook endgames. Any human would appreciate that White should be striving to keep her d-pawn above all others.

43 Rc2! was still winning, as the following rather forced line demonstrates: 43 ... Rxf4 44 Kc5! Kg7 45 d5 Kf7 46 d6 Ke8 47 Re2+ Kd8 48 Re6 Rf2 49 Rxh6 f4 50 Rh8+ Kd7 51 h6 f3 52 Rh7+ (not 52 h7?? Rh2 53 Ra8 f2! and draws) 52 ... Kd8 53 a3!! Rh2 54 Rf7 f2 55 Kc6! and White wins.

43 ... Rxd4+ 44 Ke5 Rd3 45 Rc2 Kg7 46 Rc7+ Kg8 47 Rc4 Ra3 48 Rc2 Kg7 49 Kxf5

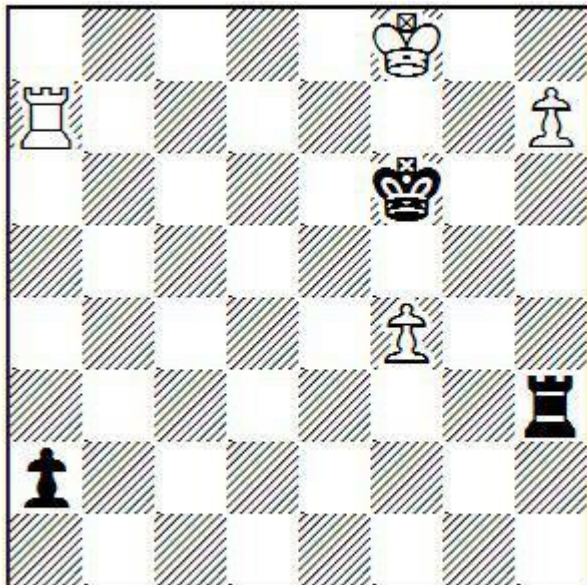
White has kept her extra pawn but has left herself with two rook's pawns and an f-pawn, increasing the draw margin considerably.

49 ... Kf7 50 Rb2 Ke7??

More examples of mutual computer blindness. Although, can we really call it 'mutual' if the same engine is playing both sides? 50 ... Kg7! would transpose to the game.

51 Re2??

The correct continuation was 51 Kg6! Rg3+ 52 Kxh6 Kf6 53 Rb6+ Kf7 54 Rb7+ (54 Rg6? Rf3! draws) 54 ... Kf6 55 Kh7! Rg2 (55 ... Ra3 56 Kg8! Rxa2 57 Rf7+ wins, while 55 ... a3 56 Ra7 places Black in a fatal zugzwang after 56 ... Rc3 57 Ra8 Rg3 58 Ra6+ Kf7 59 Kh6!) 56 a3!! (a crucial tempo-winning move; not 56 Ra7? Rxa2 57 Kg8 a3! and Black holds the draw) 56 ... Rg3 57 Ra7 Rxa3 58 Kg8 Rg3+ 59 Kf8 a3 60 h6! Rh3 (or 60 ... Rc3 61 Ra6+ Kf5 62 h7 etc) 61 h7 a2



and now White wins with a beautiful variant of the famous "Lasker's Ladder" theme: 62 Ra6+! Kf5 63 Kg7! Rg3+ 64 Kf7! Rh3 65 Ra5+ Kxf4 66 Kg7 Rg3+ 67 Kf6 Rh3 68 Ra4+ Kf3 69 Kg6 Rg3+ 70 Kf5 Rh3 71 Ra3+ Ke2 72 Rxa2+ and wins.

51 ... Kf7 52 Rc2 Ke7??

Another blunder for the same reason as above.

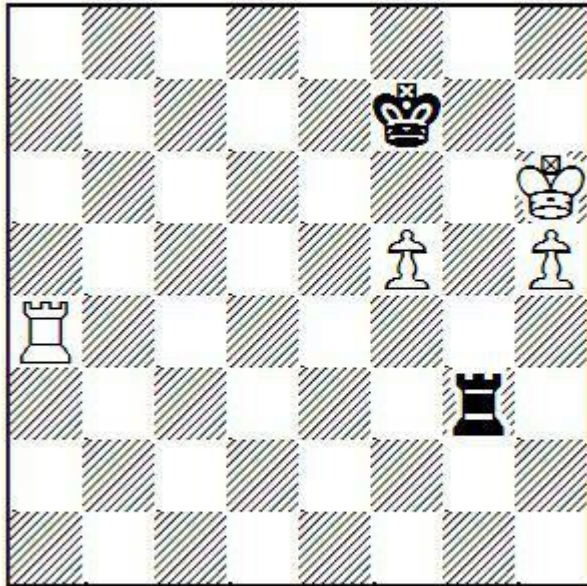
53 Rb2?? Kf7 54 Rb7+ Kg8! 55 Kg6 Rg3+ 56 Kxh6 Rg2!

The important difference from the note to White's fiftieth move is that the black king is significantly closer to the h-pawn.

57 a3 Rg3 58 f5 Rxa3 59 Rg7+ Kf8

59 ... Kh8?? 60 Rg4! Ra1 61 f6 Rf1 62 Kg6 would be an embarrassing way to lose.

60 Ra7 Rg3! 61 Rxa4 Kf7



Excellent defensive play by the engine (finally!). Black reaches the infamous, holdable endgame of rook vs. rook plus f- & h-pawns, but this position is a trivial example of the draw.

62 Ra6 Rg1 63 f6

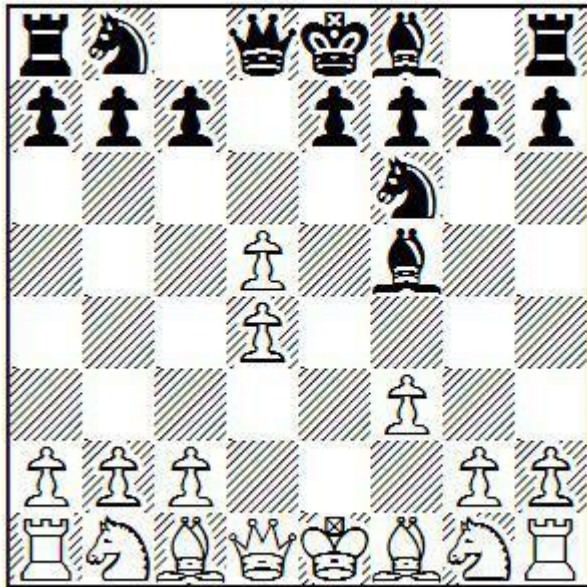
Or 63 Rg6 Rf1 64 Kg5 Rg1+ and White can't escape the checks.

63 ... Rh1 64 Rc6 Rh2 65 Rc1 Rf2 66 Ra1 Rxf6+ 67 Kh7 Rf5 68 Rh1 Kf6 69 Kh6 Kf7 70 Rb1 Rf6+ 1/2-1/2

A fascinating end to an entertaining and combative duel.

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 f3 Bf5



5 g4!

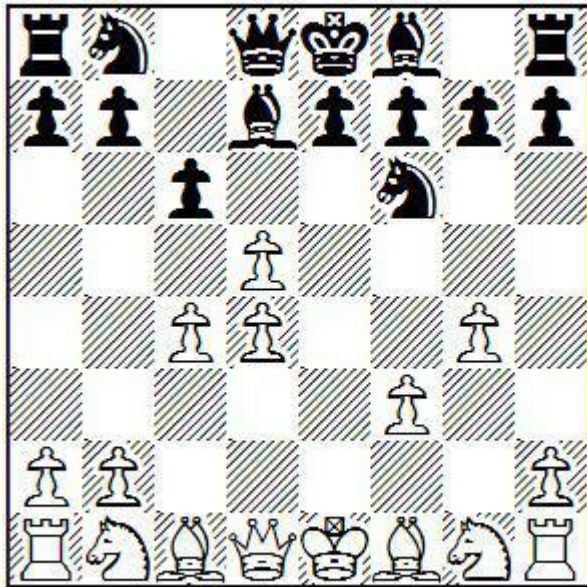
Note that the precise move-order is important: 5 c4 e6 6 Nc3 (6 g4?? is even more unfortunate, due to 6 ... Nxg4!! 7 fxc4 Qh4+ 8 Kd2 Be4 9 Nf3 Qf2+ with a clear advantage) 6 ... exd5 7 g4 Be6! 8 g5 Ng8! exploits White's inaccurate sequence, who is now in serious danger of overextending herself and will struggle to ever find a safe home for her king. Then 9 Qb3! dxc4! 10 Qxb7 Nd7 leads to a wild and woolly position in which Black's chances are not worse; e.g. 11 Qe4 Ne7 12 Bh3 Bxh3 13 Nxh3 Nb6!, with ... Qd7 and ... 0-0-0 to follow, M.Bandelj-V.Destruels Moreno, correspondence 2008.

5 ... Bg6

Instead:

a) 5 ... Bc8? 6 c4 c6 7 dxc6 Nxc6 8 d5 is just horrible for Black.

b) 5 ... Bd7!? leads to unexplored positions that may suit if you want to immediately get your opponent out of suspected preparation. Nevertheless, White can secure a substantial advantage with accurate play: 6 c4! (6 Nc3?! is weaker, in view of 6 ... e6 7 dxe6 Bxe6 8 g5 Nd5 9 Ne4 Nd7! 10 Bh3 Qe7 11 Bxe6 Qxe6 12 Ne2 f5! with active play for Black) 6 ... c6! is absolutely critical (after 6 ... e6 7 dxe6! fxe6 8 Nc3 Bd6 9 Bg2 0-0 10 Nge2, I can't believe in Black's compensation)



We are in the wild unknown in theoretical terms, but here are a few sample lines should you wish to explore this path:

a) 7 g5 Nh5 8 Nc3 cxd5 and now Black keeps active chances by meeting 9 cxd5 with 9 ... g6!, or the alternate recapture 9 Nxd5 with 9 ... h6!.

b) 7 Nc3 cxd5 8 cxd5 e6 9 dxe6 Bxe6 10 Bd3 Nc6 11 Nge2 Bb4 12 Be3 Nd5! with excellent counterplay.

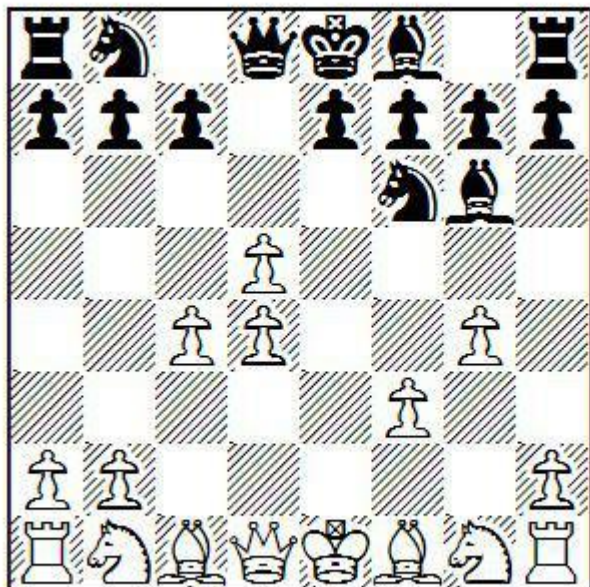
c) 7 dxc6! Nxc6 8 d5! (other moves would be answered by ... e7-e5) 8 ... Na5 9 b4! (here 9 g5 Nh5 10 Nc3 Rc8 11 b3 e6 gives Black acceptable compensation, despite the offside steeds) 9 ... e6! (not 9 ... Nxc4? 10 Bxc4 Qc7 11 Bb3 Qe5+ 12 Ne2 Qxa1 13 Nec3 and wins) 10 bxa5 Nxd5! 11 cxd5 (or 11 Qb3 Qh4+ 12 Kd1 Qf2! with a strong attack) 11 ... Qh4+ 12 Kd2 Bb4+ (12 ... Qg5+ 13 Ke2 Qe5+ 14 Kf2 Qxa1 15 Qb3 Rc8 16 Ne2 h5 17 Nbc3 Bc5+ 18 Kg3 Bd6+ 19 f4 is winning for White) 13 Nc3 0-0 14 Bb2 Rac8 15 Qb3 Qf2+ 16 Ne2 Bxa5 17 Rd1! and despite a plethora of pins, White should be able to escape with her extra material.

In this line, 13 ... Qf2+!? is tricky and forces White to play accurately, but ultimately it too falls short: 14 Ne2! (not 14 Be2? Rc8 15 Bb2 Rxc3! 15 Bxc3 Qd4+ etc) 14 ... Bxc3+ 15 Kxc3 Qxf3+ 16 Qd3 and wins. White will soon play Ba3, after which the black king will be fatally caught in the centre; for example, 16 ... Rc8+ 17 Kd2

Qxh1 18 Ba3! Rd8 19 Qd4 Bc6 20 Nf4 Bxd5 21 Kc3! Rc8+ 22 Bc5!
and Black won't survive much longer.

6 c4!

6 Bb5+ c6! 7 dxc6 Nxc6 8 Ne2 transposes to a favourable (for Black) version of the Elbow – see Game 12 (Vachier Lagrave-Smerdon) in that chapter.



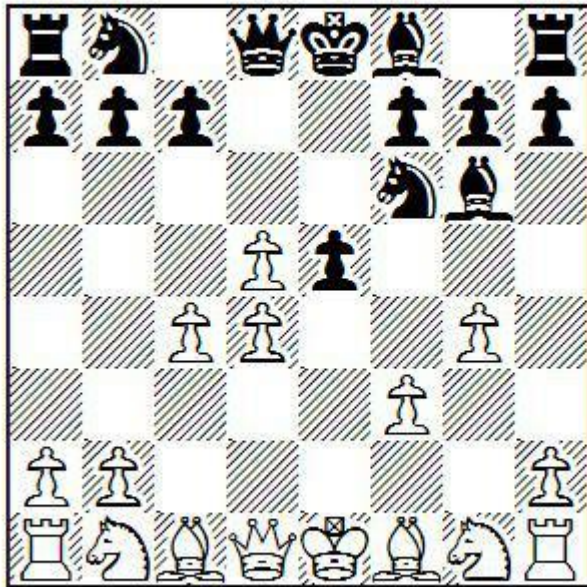
From the diagram, Black usually continues 6 ... e6, after which White has the choice between 7 g5, a seventh consecutive pawn move, and 7 Nc3. The lines can transpose if Black intends to play an early ... e6xd5, but there are good reasons why she may prefer not to open the e-file too early. Furthermore, Black has a couple of tricky alternatives on her sixth move. The first is an unsound novelty; the second is likely to prove a serious handful in over-the-board play.

A: 6 ... e5?!

B: 6 ... c6!?

C: 6 ... e6

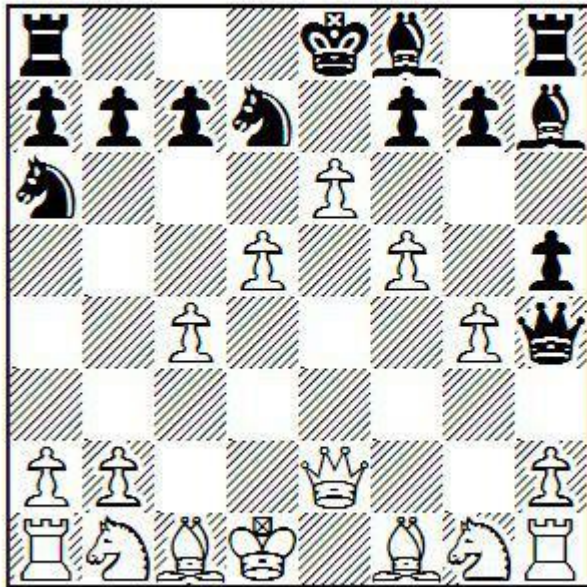
A: 6 ... e5?!



An outrageous move that has, to my knowledge, never been tried before. But it's not quite as crazy as it looks. White can secure a clear advantage, but to do it she will need to go against her instincts and continue with even more pawn moves. This line can lead to some of the strangest opening positions I have ever encountered. If you are after a practical theoretical recommendation, feel free to skip this line – but you will miss out on some splendidly bizarre chess!

7 dxe5

7 Qe2 gives Black two interesting and dangerous options: 7 ... Na6 (or 7 ... Be7!? 8 dxe5 Nxd5! 9 cxd5 Bh4+ 10 Kd1 Qxd5+ 11 Bd2 Nc6 12 Nc3 Qd7 with strong play for the piece) 8 dxe5 Nd7 9 f4 h5 10 f5 Qh4+ 11 Kd1 Bh7 12 e6.



You could be forgiven for thinking that this was a game between two toddlers. But no; this is real, computer-supported analysis. That's modern chess for you! After 12 ... fxe6 13 fxe6 Ndc5, Black has excellent compensation for the pawns.

7 ... Nfd7

7 ... Nxg4 doesn't quite work: 8 fxg4 Qh4+ 9 Ke2 Qxg4+ 10 Nf3 Qxf3+ (10 ... Nd7 11 Qd4! leaves Black floundering) 11 Kxf3 Bh5+ 12 Kg3 Bxd1, when material is restored, and only the white king and black bishop have managed to get off the bank rank! Nevertheless, after 13 Nc3, White takes the lead in development which, combined with her strong centre, guarantees a clear advantage.

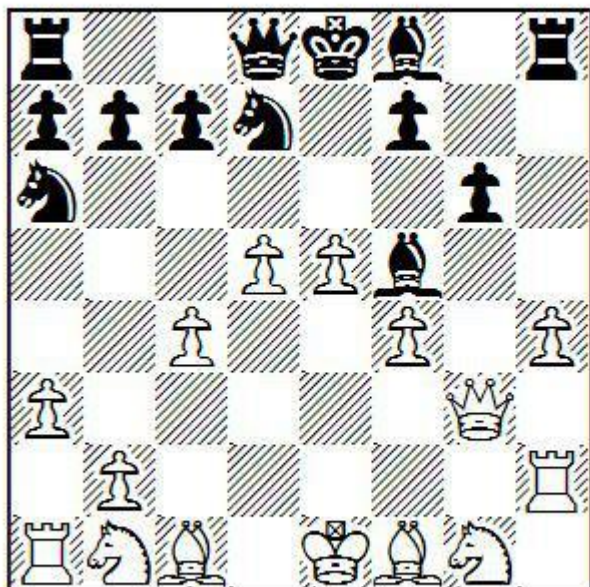
8 Bf4

The most human move, as well as the first choice of some engines. However, it is probably not the best option. Instead:

a) 8 f4?? Qh4+ 9 Kd2 Be4! 10 Nf3 Qf2+ and Black wins a piece with this common tactic.

b) 8 h4! is the strongest move according to several engines. It's as if White has forgotten that she is allowed to move pieces other than her pawns: 8 ... h5! 9 f4! Na6 10 a3 (10 f5?! Bh7 11 e6 Ndc5 creates a similar formation to that in the 7 Qe2 Na6 line above, and here

White's pawn wall will soon crumble) 10 ... Be4 11 Rh3! hxg4 12 Qxg4 g6 13 Qg3! Bf5 14 Rh2.

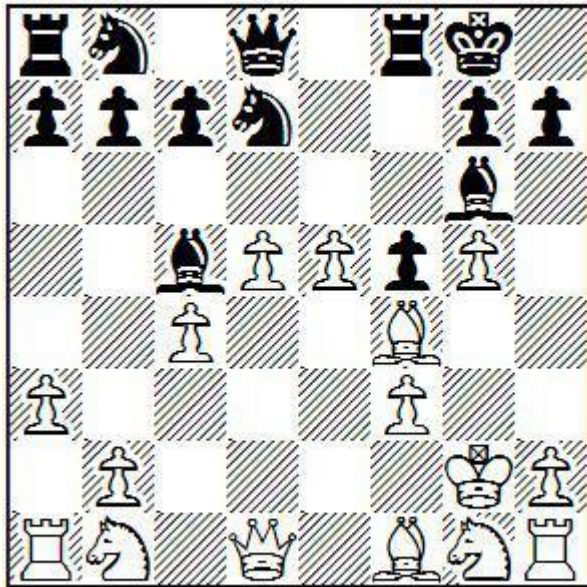


White has a decisive advantage. This line is, from a human perspective, completely ridiculous. Yet I must concede that the more I studied the computer's suggestions for White, the more I became convinced that if she plays all the best moves, White is simply winning. You may well wonder what the chances are of an opponent finding all these moves over the board, but from an integrity perspective, I simply cannot recommend a line for Black in which White is winning with best play. Still, it was worth another diagram!

8 ... Bb4+ 9 Kf2

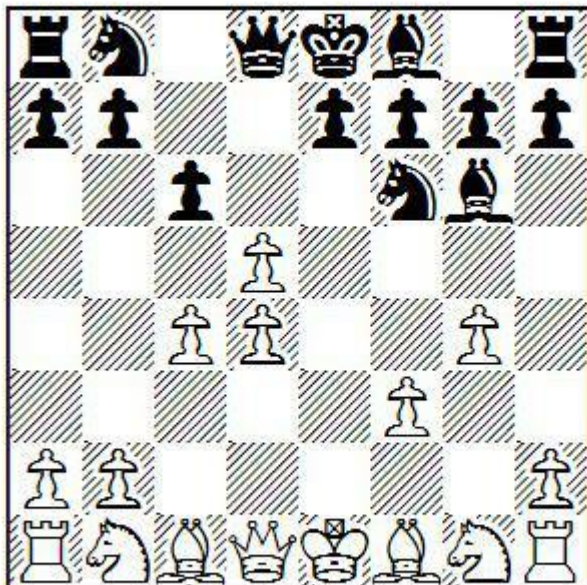
After 9 Nc3 0-0, White's e-pawn is beginning to look fragile, although engines still prefer White.

9 ... 0-0 10 a3 Bc5+ 11 Kg2 f5! 12 g5



White's twelve moves so far have consisted of nine with the pawns and two with the king! Now 12 ... Nxe5! 13 Bxe5 Qxg5+ 14 Bg3 f4 15 Nh3 Qh6 gives Black compensation. Despite this, note that 8 h4! is most likely the refutation of this line.

B: 6 ... c6!?



A rare move with a bad score, but it is better than its reputation suggests.

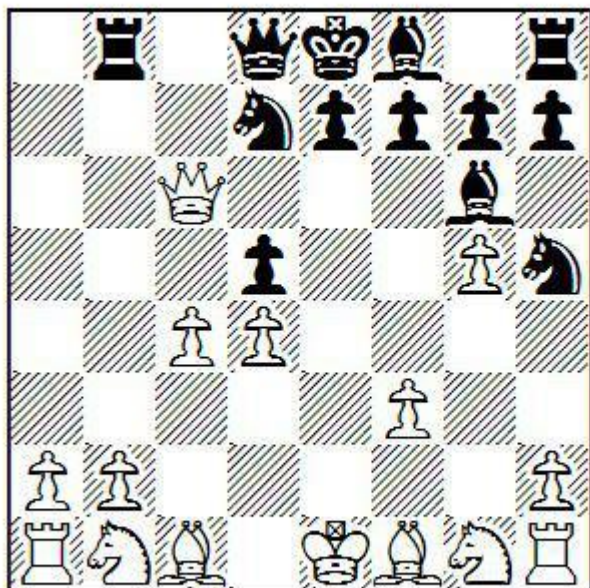
7 Nc3

Instead:

a) 7 dxc6?! Nxc6 gives Black sufficient compensation, and 8 d5 Ne5 9 Nc3 Rc8 10 f4 Nexg4 11 Be2 Nh6 12 Nf3 e6 13 Qa4+ Qd7 14 Qxd7+ Nxd7 was equal in H.Mergard-Z.Barbalic, correspondence 2009.

b) 7 g5 Nfd7 8 Nc3 cxd5 9 cxd5 transposes to the main line (note that 9 Nxd5?! e6 10 Nc3 Nc6 already favours Black, who has ideas of ... h7-h6 and ... e6-e5 to attack the white structure). Instead, 8 Qb3 should be answered by 8 ... Qb6!, when the endgame after 9 Qxb6 axb6 gives Black excellent compensation. She has strong queenside pressure, a lead in development and several tempting options to undermine the white pawn mass, such as the immediate ... e7-e5 or ... Na6 followed by ... c6-c5.

c) 7 Qb3 is the refutation supplied by most engines, but here 7 ... cxd5! 8 Qxb7 Nbd7 is dangerous for White: 9 g5 Rb8 10 Qxa7 Ra8 11 Qb7 Rb8 12 Qc6 (or 12 Qa6 Ne4!) 12 ... Nh5 with compensation for however many pawns White is willing to take.



For example, 13 Qxd5?! (surely too greedy) 13 ... e6 14 Qc6 Be7 15 f4 0-0 16 Nc3 (16 Nf3? Bc2! leaves White's queen in great peril) 16 ... e5! 17 dxe5 Nxf4!! 18 Bxf4 Rxb2 with an overwhelming attack.

7 ... cxd5 8 g5!

8 Qb3 should again be met by 8 ... dxc4 9 Qxb7 Nbd7 10 g5 Nh5 11 Bxc4 e6 with good compensation for the pawn.

8 ... Nfd7 9 cxd5!

A novelty. 9 Bf4 was seen in G.Agnello-G.Minniti, Syracuse 2007, and here 9 ... dxc4 10 Bxc4 e6! is slightly better for Black. 9 Nxd5 is also weaker due to 9 ... e6 10 Nc3 h6! and Black will follow with free, rapid development, while White's king is unlikely to ever feel safe.

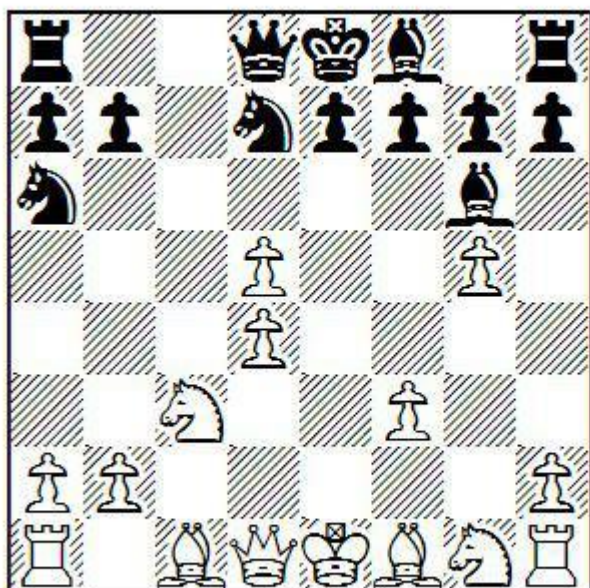
9 ... Na6!

Black's other ninth-move alternatives are interesting, but less impressive:

a) 9 ... e6 10 Qb3! Qb6 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bh3 is good for White.

b) 9 ... e5?! is tricky, but after the accurate sequence 10 dxe5 Bc5 11 f4! Qb6 12 Nf3 (12 Nh3 0-0 is less clear) 12 ... Na6 13 Bh3! Nb4 14 Kf1!, White can secure a huge plus.

c) 9 ... h6!? 10 gxh6 Na6 11 Qa4 Bf5 12 Nge2 g6 13 Ng3 Bxh6 14 Bxh6 Rxh6 leads to a murky position.



By now, we have definitely left the realm of established theory. My analysis suggests that White can keep an advantage from this position with precise play, but Black retains good practical chances. In particular, White's disjointed pawn structure often gives Black positional as well as tactical compensation in the endgames that usually arise.

I have 'tested' this variation by getting my club-level colleagues to play blitz matches against each other, and by running deep engine-vs-engine matches. The results are surprisingly promising, and it may be that this line offers Black the best practical chances against the Correspondence. I don't claim that Black's sacrifice is objectively sound against accurate resistance, but Black's position is somewhat easier to play and has a certain structural justification. I realize this may sound like the ramblings of a desperate lunatic, but I urge you not to be too dismissive of Black's chances, particularly against an unsuspecting opponent.

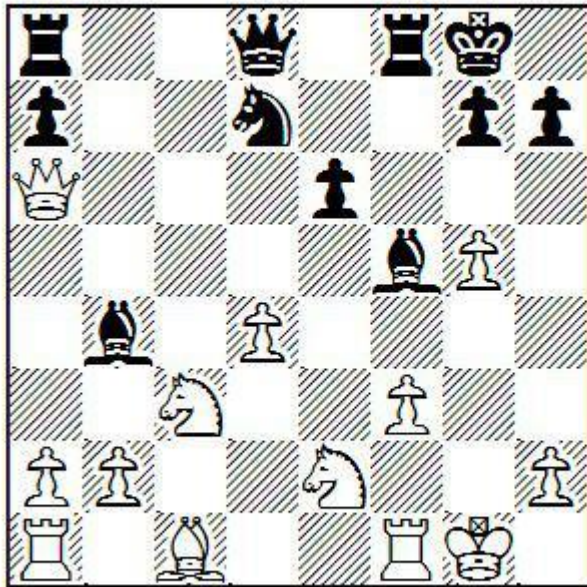
Let's look a little deeper:

10 Bf4!

Other moves:

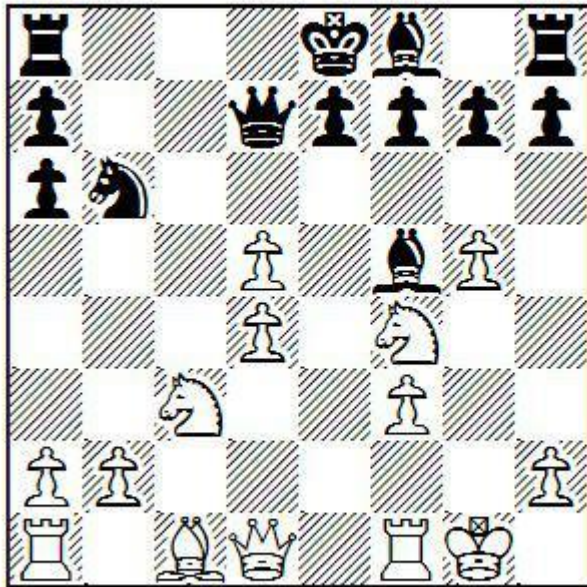
a) 10 Qb3 seems like a critical try at first, but 10 ... Qb6! 11 Qxb6 (after 11 Bb5 Nc7! 12 Bxd7+ Kxd7 13 Qa4+ Kd8, Black's king is reasonably safe behind the shield of White's doubled d-pawns – at least, he's the safer of the two kings on the board! – and 14 Nge2 h6 15 gxh6 Bd3 offers decent counterplay for the two pawns) 11 ... Nxb6 12 Bb5+ Kd8 13 Bxa6 bxa6 14 Nge2 h6! leaves Black with endgame compensation based on the typical combination of the bishop pair and a superior structure. Black drew comfortably in the test game *Houdini 4 Pro-Houdini 4 Pro*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.

b) 10 Qa4 is another important attempt to blow Black out of the water. Greedy neglect of White's development should naturally be met by rapid development, even at the expense of another pawn: 10 ... e6! 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bxa6 bxa6 13 Qxa6 Bf5 (13 ... Qb6!? gives Black almost-sufficient compensation in the endgame, thanks to the two bishops and White's weak f- and d-pawns) 14 Nge2 Bb4 15 0-0 0-0.



Again, Black's compensation is almost, if not quite, worth a pawn. Black has the two bishops (although an exchange on c3 is likely) and can make good use of the d5-square. White's pawn structure is a mess and she will need to pay constant attention to her airy kingside. With best play White should be able to navigate the dangers, but even so, my engines invariably end up drawing from this position in computer-simulated matches. In a timed game between two imperfect humans, anything can happen!

c) 10 Bxa6 bxa6 11 Nge2 is a logical sequence, when 11 ... Nb6 12 0-0 Qd7 13 Nf4 Bf5! is pleasant for Black.



Again, Black has the bishop pair and a superior structure; she will fianchetto her bishop on g7 and castle, after which the isolated, doubled pawn duo on d4 and d5 will start to come under attack, while the holes in White's kingside are also likely to make themselves felt.

10 ... Qb6

After 10 ... e6 11 Qb3 Qb6 12 Qxb6 Nxb6 13 Bb5+ Kd8 14 Bxa6 bxa6 15 dxe6 fxe6 16 Nge2, White has a clear advantage, although converting the extra pawn will be extremely difficult.

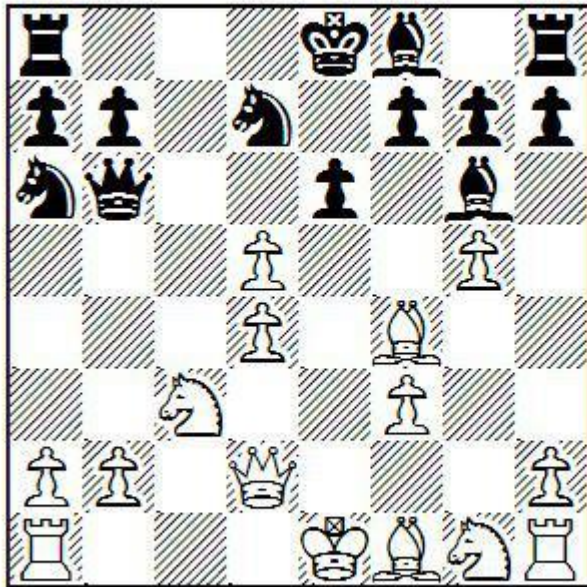
11 Qd2

The most logical response. Black must continue energetically.

a) 11 Qb3? Nb4! is good for Black, as 12 Rc1 Qxd4! is winning.

b) 11 Rc1 e5! 12 dxe6 (12 dxe5? Bc5! is very dangerous for White) 12 ... fxe6 gives Black rapid development and good play. A plausible continuation is 13 Bb5 Be7 14 Bxd7+ (or 14 Nge2 0-0!) 14 ... Kxd7 15 Nge2 Rhc8 16 0-0 Ke8 with compensation.

11 ... e6!



12 Kf2!

A tough move to find over the board, voluntarily stepping out with the king, and even into a pin!

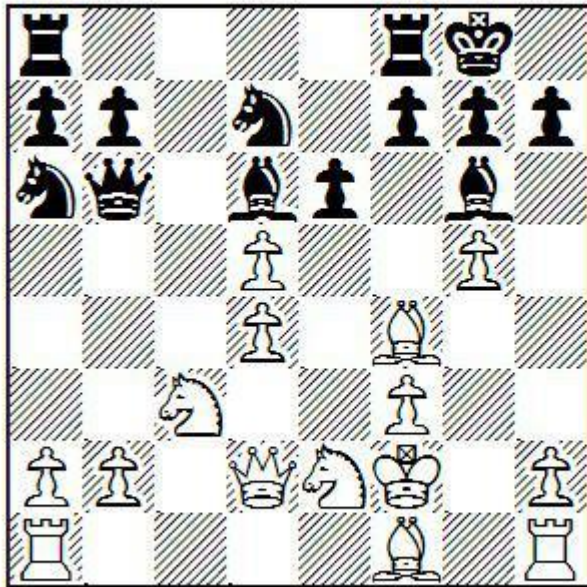
Instead:

a) 12 Bd3? Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Qxb2! 14 Rb1 Nb4! gives Black a clear advantage.

b) 12 dxe6 fxe6 allows Black active play; for example, 13 Bc4 Rc8 14 Bb3 Nb4! with ... Nd3+ to follow.

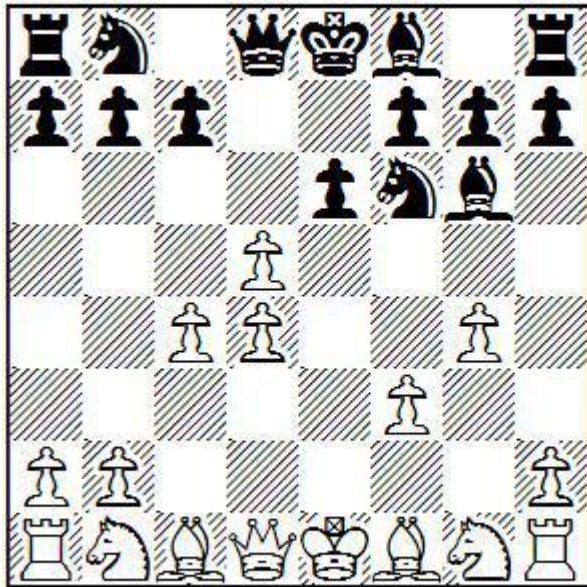
c) 12 a3 is natural, but 12 ... Bd6! leaves Black with an improved version of the main line, as White may have to shuffle her king to f2 at some point anyway. This was tested in another *Stockfish-Stockfish* clash (given in the notes to Game 7).

12 ... Bd6 13 Nge2 0-0



This position was reached in Game 7(*Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*). White is still a pawn to the good, but Black is very active and her position is full of dynamic potential. White will soon have to take a decision regarding her d5-pawn, and an exchange on e6 will open the f-file for Black's rook, which is already nicely lined up against the white king. Objectively, one cannot claim full compensation for the pawn, but given that White would have had to show impressive accuracy to reach a position in which Black still retains good attacking chances, I think we should be satisfied with the outcome of the opening.

C: 6 ... e6



White has made six pawn moves in a row, and might well add a seventh. While this may seem extraordinarily cheeky, White isn't *that* far behind in development; after all, Black has moved her bishop three times already, and her f6-knight is about to be kicked offside.

From our perspective, White will usually try to blow us off the board over the next few moves, fighting us with our own style as she seemingly ignores positional considerations in favour of concrete tactics. The knight on c3, combined with the coming g4-g5 thrust, ensures that she will keep control over d5. The queen usually lines up against our king from e2, while her own king can tuck in at f2 if necessarily. A kingside pawn storm is often on the cards, while the kingside minor pieces usually swing in to the game via the h3-square. All up, White's position contains a lot of hidden attacking potential.

If all of that has managed to scare you, well, that was the intention! You should definitely not take White's set-up for granted. But never fear; there is plenty of good news for the black side as well. For the moment, at least, White hasn't got a single piece out from its starting position, whereas Black is just two moves from castling. This is actually the key trump in our hand: while the white

king will have a hard time finding long-term security, Black's will (usually) be safely tucked away for when the fireworks start.

While the main lines analysed by the correspondence community have usually focused on Black's attempts to win back her pawn, naturally, we will prefer to forego the material and play for maximum activity. The only way to combat White's attempt at an outright refutation is to stand up to the challenge and fight fire with fire.

From the diagram, White has a choice of move-orders, which will likely to lead to the same thing if Black quickly takes on d5. However, Black has several good reasons to avoid this, not least because White can often use an open e-file to her advantage. The pawn on e6 is actually doing a good job at the moment, both blocking the e-file from an annoying Qe2+ and controlling the f5-square against a quick f4-f5 assault. Black may well break the tension on d5 at some point, but for the moment, she should prefer to develop her king's bishop and quickly castle, exploiting her lead in development to maximum effect. A key theme is meeting Qb3 with the odd-looking counter ... c7-c5. In fact, even without provocation, Black can often attack White's central pawn phalanx with this move to open up some squares and lines for the black minor pieces.

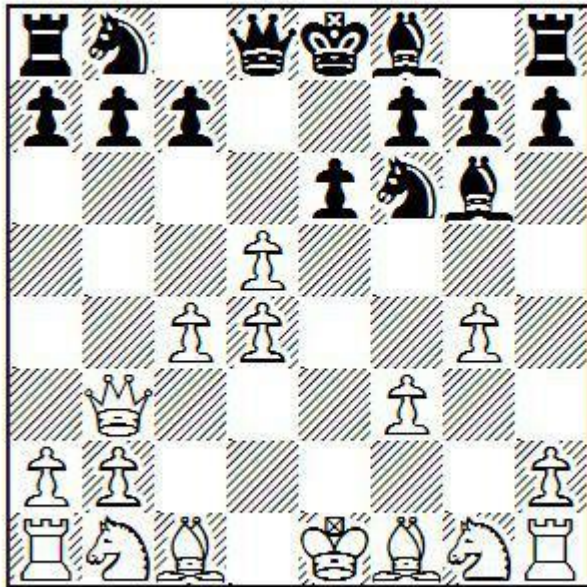
White's best move by far is 7 Nc3, but first we will examine the alternatives. If you're looking for quick memory-markers, my advice is: after 7 g5 Nfd7 8 Nc3, play 8 ... Be7!; if White goes for 7 Nc3, play 7 ... c5! so as to answer 8 g5 with 8 ... cxd4!.

C1: 7 Qb3?!

C2: 7 g5

C3: 7 Nc3!

C1: 7 Qb3?!



This scores well in general, but not when Black has played the strongest move:

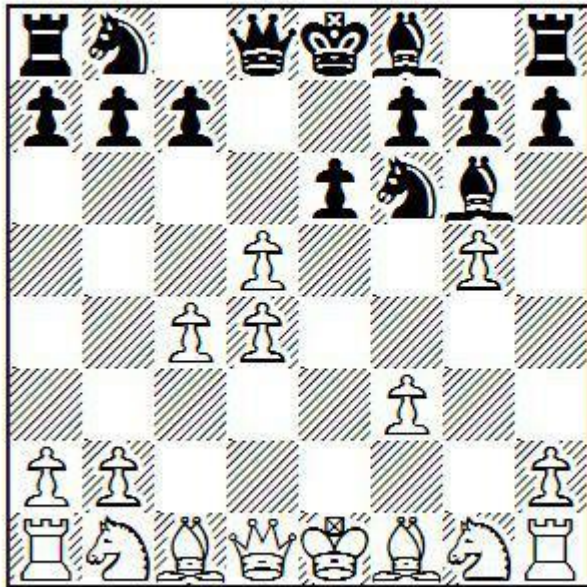
7 ... c5! 8 Qxb7 Nbd7 9 g5 Rb8!

Or the immediate 9 ... Nh5, as in P.J.Ryan-B.Lindqvist, correspondence 2007.

10 Qxa7 Nh5!

... grants Black an unstoppable attack. In a sense, justice is served: White's army is still sleeping while the queen has been scouting for pawns.

C2: 7 g5



7 ... Nfd7

7 ... Nh5 8 Nc3 Be7 9 f4 h6 10 Bd3! keeps a clear advantage for White.

8 Nc3

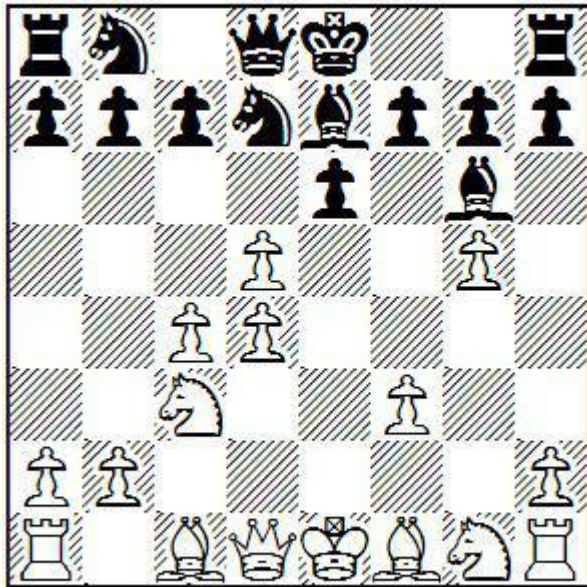
8 Qb3 should again be met by 8 ... c5!, intending 9 Qxb7 Nb6; though Wind's 8 ... Na6!? 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 c5 Bxc5! 11 dxc5 Ndxc5 is very interesting too.

Now after 8 ... exd5 we transpose to line C31 (analysed under 7 Nc3 below). But Black can take the opportunity to deviate:

8 ... Be7!

Developing with a gain of time; White is forced to make yet another pawn move.

8 ... Bb4!? is also interesting: 9 a3 Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 0-0 11 Qb3 was L.Magalhães-Pl.Stefanov, correspondence 2011, when Black should have played the standard counterstroke 11 ... c5! 12 Qxb7 Qa5! with very good play for the pawn.

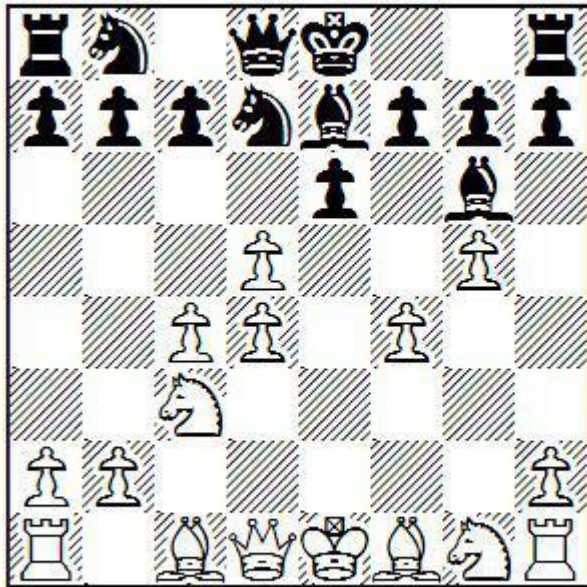


White can defend the pawn on g5 in one of two ways. 9 h4 is the first choice of most engines, but I believe 9 f4, with the intention of Bh3, may be stronger.

C21: 9 f4

C22: 9 h4

C21: 9 f4



Black now has a choice:

9 ... c5!?

This looks to be best, striking back in the centre.

a) 9 ... exd5 is probably insufficient on account of 10 Bh3! (10 Nf3?! dxc4! 11 Bxc4 0-0 12 0-0 Nb6 is good for Black, while 10 Nxd5 Nb6! offers excellent compensation) 10 ... f6 (the piece sacrifice 10 ... dxc4!? is interesting but ultimately falls short: 11 f5 Nc6 12 fxg6 hxg6 13 Bg2 Bxg5 14 Bxg5 Qxg5 15 Bxc6 bxc6 is better for White; she still has some work to do to safeguard her king, but then Black's pawns are ripe for the picking) 11 Nxd5 fxg5 12 Nf3 with a clear advantage to White.

b) 9 ... 0-0?! 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 Bh3! is again annoying. Black could try the outlandish and surely unsound 11 ... Bxg5!? 12 fxg5 Nc6; for example, 13 Nf3 Rxf3! 14 Bxe6+ Kh8 15 Qxf3 Nxd4 16 Qd5 Nc2+ 17 Kf2 Qf8+ 18 Kg2 Nb6 19 Qxb7 Qe7, but White should win with best play.

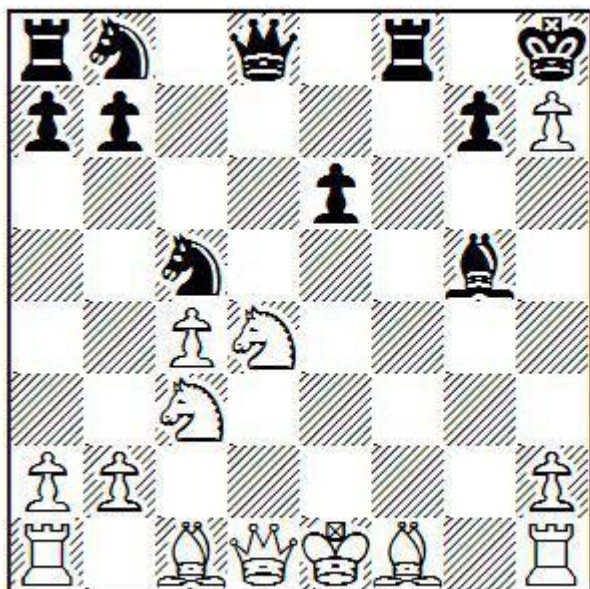
10 Nf3

10 h4!? exd5 11 h5 Bf5 is very messy; e.g. 12 dxc5 Nxc5 13 Qxd5 Qc8! with compensation for the pawn.

10 ... 0-0

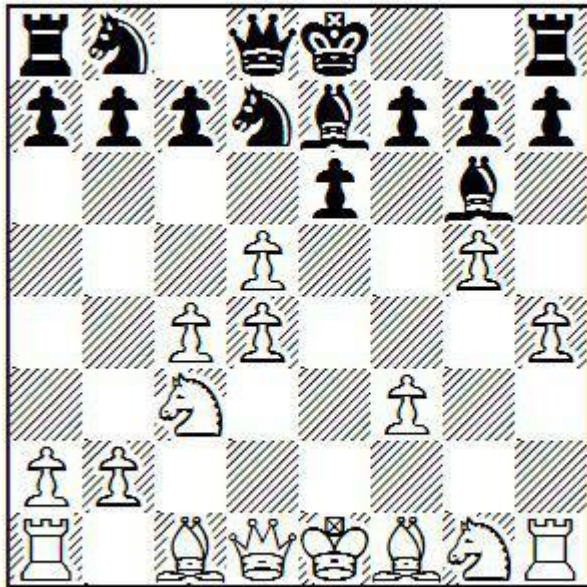
Having finally castled, Black is now ready to deal with the tension in the centre, while ... Bh5, pinning the knight on f3, is another attractive option. Play might continue:

11 dxe6 cxd4 12 Nxd4 Nc5 13 f5 Bxg5 14 fxg6 fxe6 15 gxh7+ Kh8



Black has lasting compensation against the white king, who has lost practically his entire pawn shield.

C22: 9 h4



The first choice of most engines, but perhaps not best.

9 ... 0-0 10 Nge2!

Other moves:

a) 10 Qb3 was Ali.Frey-K.Bhakti, World Junior Championships, Athens 2012, and again the typical strike was called for: 10 ... c5! 11 Qxb7 cxd4 with a clear advantage to Black.

b) 10 Bd3 exd5 11 Nxd5, I.Popelyshev-A.Shefer, Moscow 2011, and here 11 ... Nb6! offers excellent compensation.

10 ... c5!

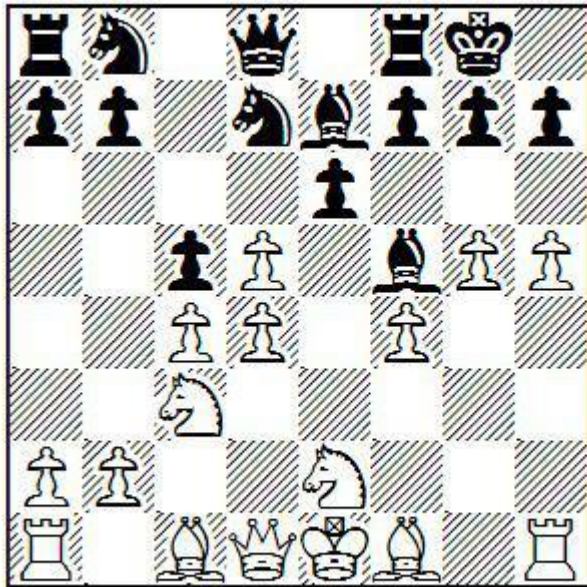
Black strikes in the centre in typical fashion, opening lines and paving the way for the rest of her army to join the attack. Black has dangerous compensation for the pawn, and White will have a hard time navigating the opening waters safely in an over-the-board encounter.

11 h5

After 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bh3 cxd4! 13 Nxd4 Ne5 14 Bxe6+ Kh8 15 Bd5 Qb6!, Black has a strong attack for the two pawns.

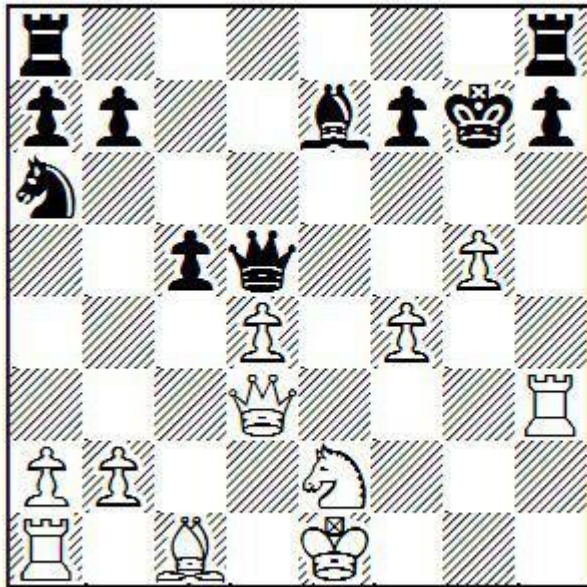
11 ... Bf5 12 f4!

12 Rg1 Nb6 13 Ng3 Re8! gives Black good compensation.



White is trying to smash Black off the board before her own king safety and lack of development become factors. The attack is surprisingly dangerous, though also committal; the game is extremely sharp. Objectively, White is better, but it won't be too long until she will have to worry about her king. Play might continue:

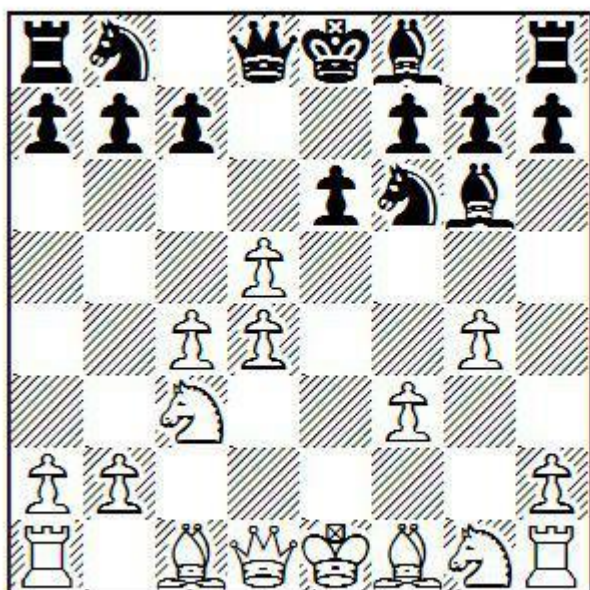
12 ... Na6 13 Bh3 Bxh3 14 Rxh3 exd5 15 Nxd5 Nb6! 16 h6 Nxd5 17 hxg7 Kxg7 18 cxd5 Qxd5 19 Qd3 Rh8



Black's king is defended, and she has ideas of ... c5-c4 and ... Nb4 to harass the white queen and create threats within the enemy position.

It is very possible that there are improvements for both sides to be found in this variation, but from a practical perspective, Black's compensation in these foggy, chaotic positions seems sufficient for over-the-board play.

C3: 7 Nc3!



Given an explanation mark by Michiel Wind in *Kaissiber*, and deservedly so. After all, White finally develops a piece! We enter an extremely complex and underexplored structure, perfect conditions for a fighting player to thrive. Black has several interesting possibilities, revolving around either swift development or challenging White's pawn centre. For her part, White will have to play accurately over the next few moves, and will often be forced to make several more pawn moves (such as h2-h4 or g4-g5) in order to prevent Black's minor pieces from becoming active, though if she manages to achieve this, she has excellent chances of earning a decisive advantage.

Other than Wind's work, I have been unable to find any other published analysis on this line. However, one can get an idea of the established theory by following the historical progression of correspondence games in this variation. Here, too, there are many improvements to be found.

We will look at several options for Black from the diagram, beginning with the 'main line' (if you can call it that for such a limited body of theory), 7 ... exd5. Again, I would like to stress that the chances of you ever getting even as far as the diagrammed position are quite remote, so you should consider how best to use your

Scandinavian study time before delving deeply into the analysis that follows.

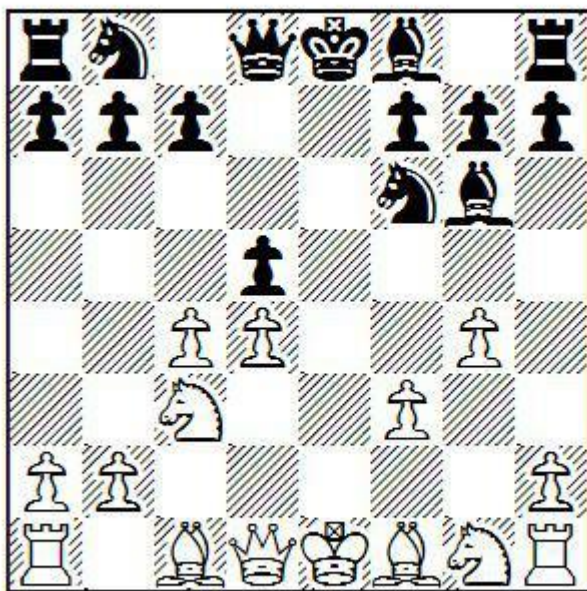
C31: 7 ... exd5

C32: 7 ... Bd6!?

C33: 7 ... Be7!?

C34: 7 ... c5

C31: 7 ... exd5

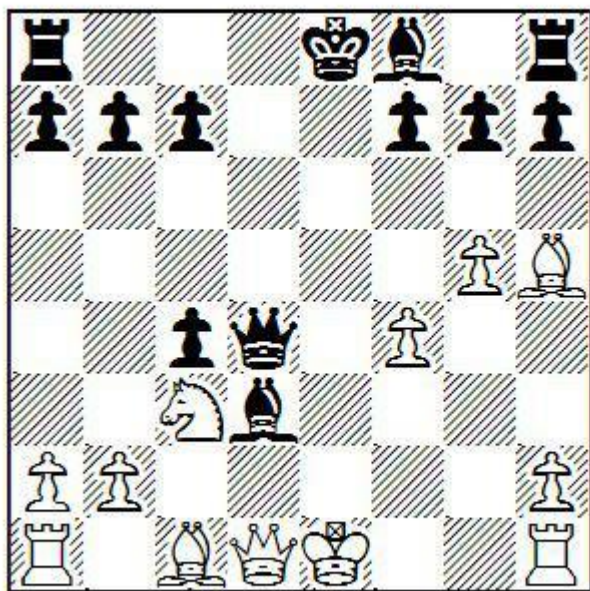


The most natural reaction, and indeed considered the main line within the very light theory that exists. In fact, Wind doesn't mention any other move in his article. However, the text leads almost by force to an ending that is somewhat unpleasant for Black.

8 g5! Nfd7

The unsightly and unplayed 8 ... Ng8!? could warrant further investigation. For example, 9 Qe2+ (9 Nxd5 Ne7 10 Qe2 c6! leaves White's pawns feeling vulnerable) 9 ... Be7 10 Nxd5 (10 cxd5 h6 11 f4 Kf8!? 12 Nf3 Nd7 is messy) 10 ... Nc6 11 Be3 Nb4!? 12 Nxb4 Bxb4+ 13 Bd2+ Be7 with pressure on d4 and the typical ... h7-h6 break to come.

Instead, 8 ... Nh5?! 9 f4! Nc6 10 Be2! wins a piece, and White can safely hold on to the material after some further accuracy: 10 ... dxc4 11 Bxh5 Bd3 (11 ... Nxd4 12 Bxg6 hxg6 13 Nf3 is safely better for White; or if 11 ... Bxh5 12 Qxh5 Nxd4 then 13 Kf2!, as we saw in Game 6, Popov-Laylo) 12 Nf3 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qxd4



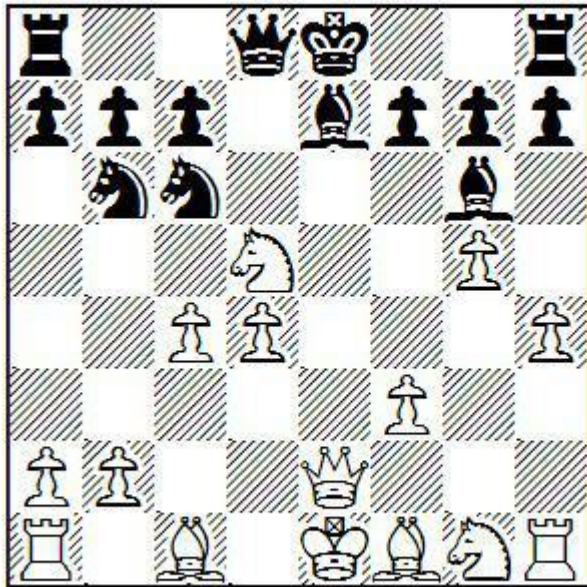
14 Qf3! (the only move, but sufficient) 14 ... Bc5 15 Bd2! Bc2! 16 Ne2 Qe4 17 Rc1! 0-0 18 Qxe4 Bxe4 19 Rxc4 Bxh1 20 Rxc5 c6 21 Ra5 and after some tactical acrobatics, White has reached a technically winning endgame, P.Corbat-J.Achermann, correspondence 2012.

9 Nxd5 Nc6 10 h4!

This leads to a long, forcing variation that Black would prefer to avoid.

10 c5 is positionally tempting, but lets Black off the hook: 10 ... Be7 11 Bf4 0-0! 12 Bxc7 Qe8 13 Ne2 Bxg5 14 Rg1 Bd8! and despite the pawn deficit, Black's position is to be favoured, S.Ottesen-P.Corbat, correspondence 2007.

10 ... Nb6 11 Qe2+! Be7



12 Nxe7

12 h5 is an important alternative. After 12 ... Bf5 13 Nxe7 Nxd4 (13 ... Nxe7!? transposes to the next note) 14 Nxf5+ Nxe2 15 Nxe2 0-0, White has three pieces for the queen, but the position is incredibly sharp, with both kings in imminent danger. If you choose to play 7 ... exd5, it's at least worth noting that White also has this option at her disposal.

12 ... Nxd4

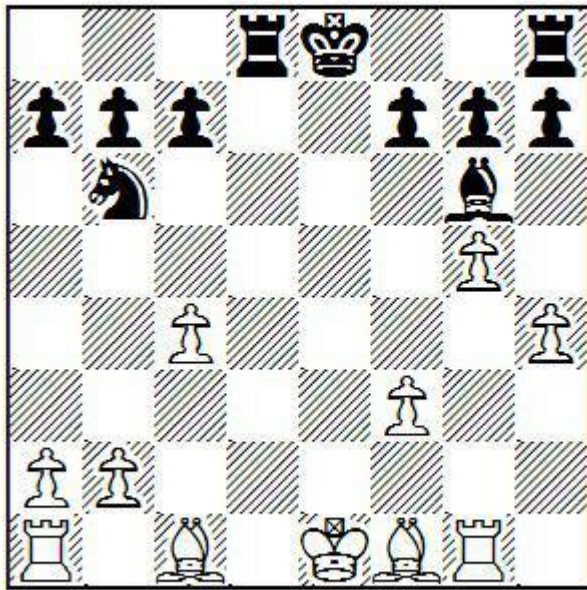
12 ... Nxe7!? is a tricky move, steadfastly refusing to trade queens. The strong Singaporean IM Kevin Goh Wei Ming (remember him from Inspirational Game 3?) pointed out to me that after 13 h5 Bf5 White's task is quite difficult from a practical standpoint, and I agree, e.g. 14 Qe5 0-0 15 Kf2 (15 h6 f6!) 15 ... Qd7 16 d5 Rae8 with reasonable compensation and very good chances over-the-board. My engines prefer White, but with only her king and queen developed (!) and an overextended pawn structure, she faces a tough job to hold her position together. Other 'normal' tries for White run into similar practical problems, but in the end I decided not to recommend this line for Black on account of the somewhat bizarre and yet surprisingly strong computer recommendation 14 Qd2!. The strange idea is the switchback 14 ... Nc6 15 Qe3+! Ne7 16 Kf2! and, despite my best efforts, I couldn't break down my computer's accurate play with the white pieces. Still, if you don't believe your

opponent will find this odd manoeuvre, then 12 ... Nxe7 is well worth a gamble.

13 Nc6+ Nxe2 14 Nxd8 Nxg1 15 Rxg1!

A novelty. After 15 Nxb7 Nxf3+ 16 Kf2 Ne5! 17 Bf4 f6 18 gxf6 gxf6 19 Re1 Nbd7!, Black's control of e5 will counterbalance the bishops, B.Tzonev-Va.Vasilev, correspondence 2011.

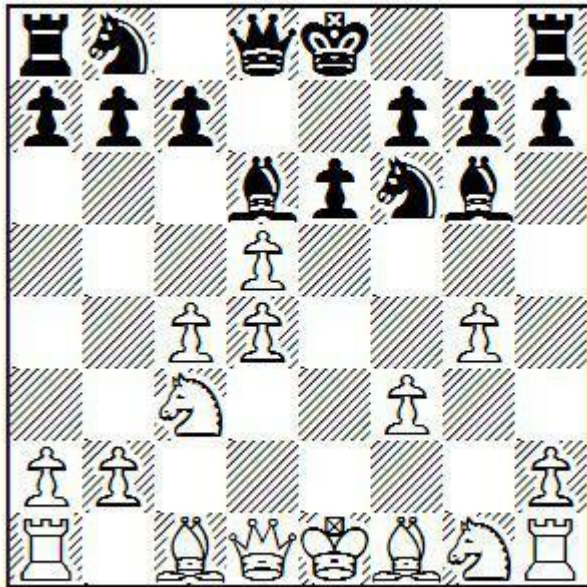
15 ... Rxd8



A critical position for the evaluation of the entire 5 g4 variation, as this represents the culmination of each player's best moves following 7 ... exd5. Unfortunately, the endgame is simply more comfortable for White, who has the bishop pair, more space, and even (now that we have entered an endgame) a more aggressive pawn structure. On the other hand, the reduced material and symmetrical pawn islands give Black good practical chances, and it is still debatable as to whether the endgame is winning for White from an objective sense; the few (correspondence) games that have been played have led to mixed results.

Play might continue 16 b3 0-0 17 Kf2 Bf5 18 Bf4 c6 19 Be2 Rd4 20 Kg3 f6, as in *garaba-jordache2*, correspondence 2013, and here challenging the open d-file with 21 Rad1 would maintain an endgame advantage.

C32: 7 ... Bd6!?



A novelty, and a tricky move to meet. Black ignores the tension in the centre and simply develops, preparing to castle.

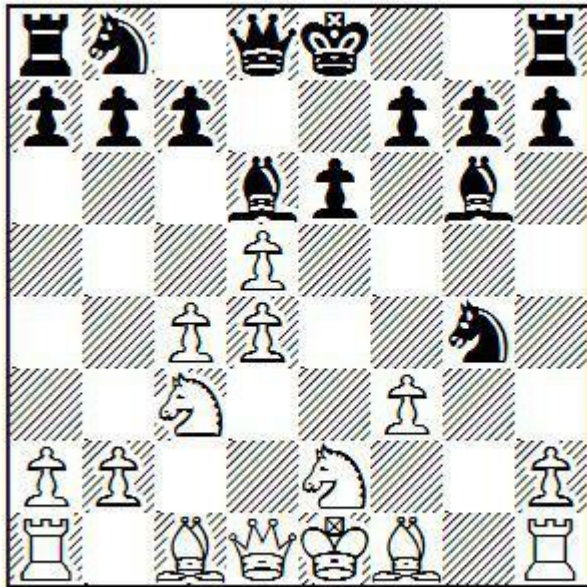
8 Nge2!

The only move to ensure White stays on top. Instead:

a) 8 c5 Be7 9 h4 h5! 10 dxe6 hxg4 11 fxg4 Nc6! 12 exf7+ Bxf7 gives Black dangerous compensation for the two pawns.

b) 8 g5 Nh5 9 dxe6 (or 9 Nge2 0-0 10 Bh3 c5!) 9 ... fxe6 10 Nge2 0-0 11 Bh3 Rxf3 12 Bxe6+ Kh8 13 Bd5 Rd3 14 Qb3 Nd7! and Black has a dangerous initiative.

8 ... Nxg4!?



This is tempting, but it leads to a long, forcing variation in which White emerges on top.

Other moves:

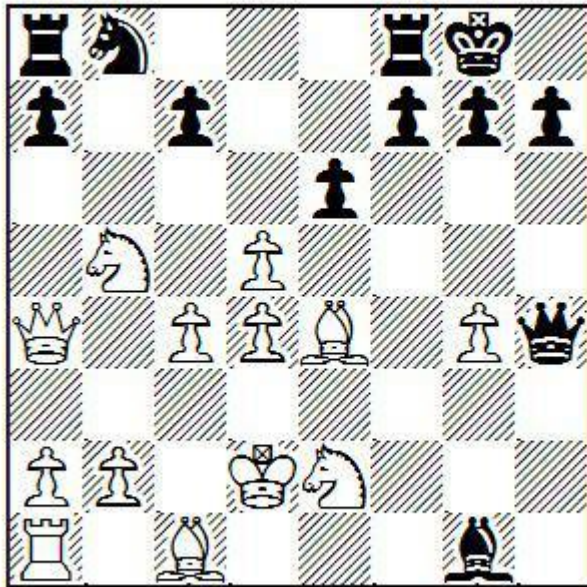
a) 8 ... exd5 9 g5 dxc4 10 gxf6 Qxf6 11 Ng3 and Black doesn't have enough for the material.

b) 8 ... 0-0 would work well, were it not for 9 h4!, and despite White's barbaric strategy, it seems that simply launching the kingside pawns down the board gives her a decisive advantage. For example, 9 ... h6 10 h5 Bh7 11 g5! hxg5 12 Bxg5 and White is winning.

9 Qa4+!

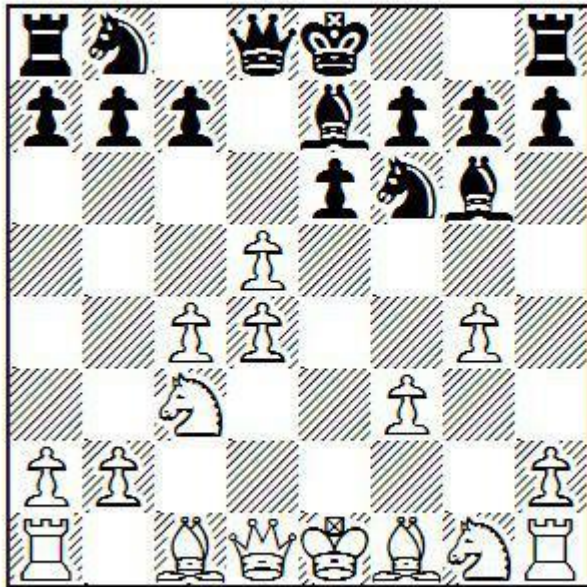
9 fxg4 Qh4+ 10 Kd2 Qg5+ is a draw.

9 ... b5! 10 Nxb5 Qh4+ 11 Kd2 0-0! 12 fxg4 Be4 13 Rg1 Bxh2 14 Bg2! Bxg1 15 Bxe4



White has lost her kingside but gained material! As always in the Correspondence, she still has problems with her king, but, with careful play, the minor pieces should prove superior to the rook in the long run. From a practical perspective, this line is a seriously tempting option for Black, though I wouldn't try it out in correspondence chess; objectively, White is clearly better.

C33: 7 ... Be7!?



Another little-tested idea.

8 h4!

Yet another non-developing move. Still, this flank attack is a common theme for White in this variation, helping White justify 5 g4. Instead:

a) 8 g5 Nfd7 transposes to 7 g5 Nfd7 8 Nc3 Be7! in line C2 above.

b) 8 dxe6 fxe6! (8 ... Nc6 9 Be3 fxe6 10 a3 Nd7 11 Nge2 0-0 turned out well for Black in A.Montalvo-D.Laylo, Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010, but White could have kept a clear advantage with the natural 10 Bd3!) 9 Be3 c5! 10 dxc5 Nc6 11 Qxd8+ Rxd8 with almost-sufficient compensation in the queenless middlegame.

8 ... h6!

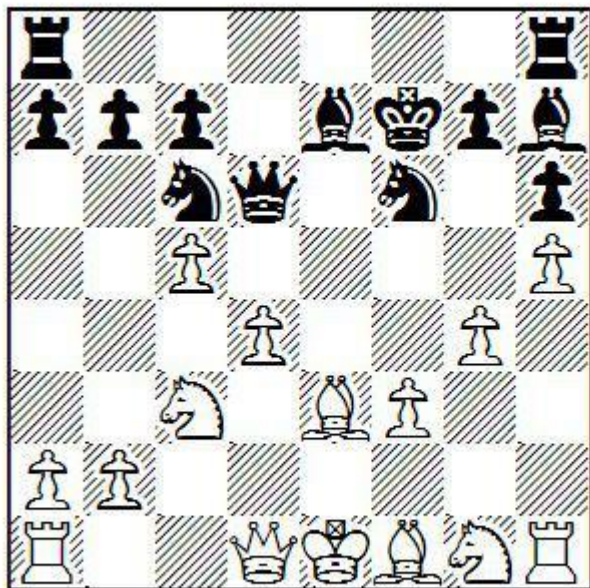
Not 8 ... exd5? 9 Qa4+ Nc6 10 h5! Nxg4 11 Be2! and wins; or 8 ... 0-0? 9 h5 Nxh5 10 gxh5 Bh4+ 11 Kd2 Bxh5 12 Kc2! and the white king makes a rare escape to the queenside.

9 dxe6 Nc6

9 ... fxe6 is Black's best try, but then 10 Bd3 Bf7 11 Be3! is natural and strong; e.g. 11 ... c5 12 dxc5 Nc6 13 Qe2 with a clear advantage. Black's compensation is worth perhaps one pawn, but certainly not two.

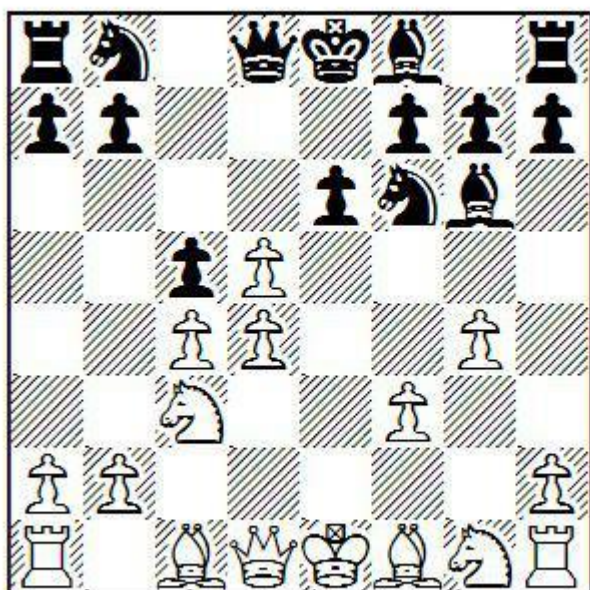
10 Be3 Qd6?

Again 10 ... fxe6 is better, though Black is still in deep trouble: 11 Bd3 Bf7 12 Nge2 and Black has nothing to show for the pawn deficit.
11 h5 Bh7 12 exf7+ Kxf7 13 c5!



White is winning, I.Gazik-S.Krivoshey, Hlohovec 1998. Incidentally, Igor Gazik deserves fair credit for this win, it being the first over-the-board tournament game where White employed this variation with 7 Nc3, and against none other than the great 3 ... Bg4 hero Sergei Krivoshey.

C34: 7 ... c5



Looking at the previous lines, it is clear that Black is struggling to prove full compensation against best play by White. Hence the need for a fresh, dynamic counter-punch: 7 ... c5. This interesting move seeks to rattle White's pawn centre and free up some squares for Black's minor pieces. The resulting positions are both unusual and extremely complicated. From a practical perspective, White has the tougher job, as one small slip could mean a swift checkmate. Objectively, I cannot believe that Black's compensation is sufficient with best play, but I am confident in Black's chances in an over-the-board encounter, particularly at sub-grandmaster levels.

To test my theory, I ran a little chess experiment. I had two of my strong blitz colleagues play a ten-game blitz match from this position with alternating colours. Both players were taught the basic theory and then left to their own devices. Black scored an impressive nine out of ten, confirming that White has a much harder task keeping things together in this line. Of course, this isn't a serious scientific test, but it gives you an idea of the practical chances available to Black after 7 ... c5.

Memorizing what follows is inadvisable given the infrequency with which you will encounter this variation, but going over the lines will

be a very useful exercise in understanding the ideas and themes for both sides that characterize the positions.

8 Nge2!

Best, though after this move White needs to be able to answer each of Black's tries with precision. On the other hand, White's eighth-move alternatives are less convincing:

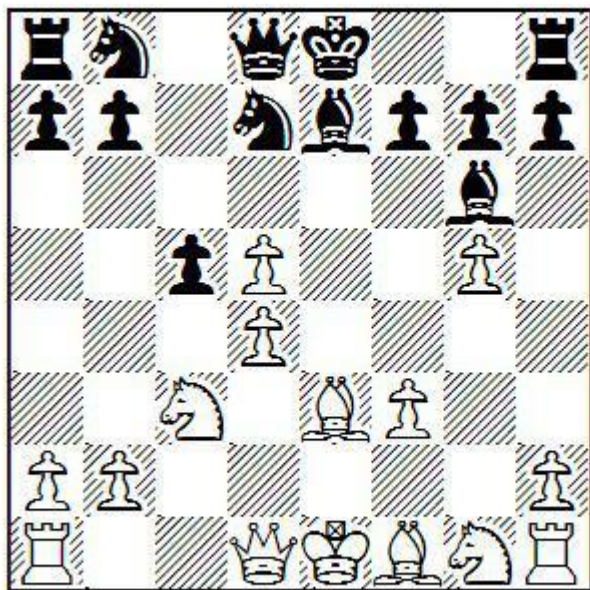
a) 8 dxe6? cxd4 is clearly better for Black.

b) 8 g5?! cxd4! 9 Qxd4 Nc6 10 Qd1 Nb4! also turns out well for Black.

c) 8 Bf4 cxd4 9 Qxd4 Qa5 10 Qd2 Bb4 allows Black to develop freely.

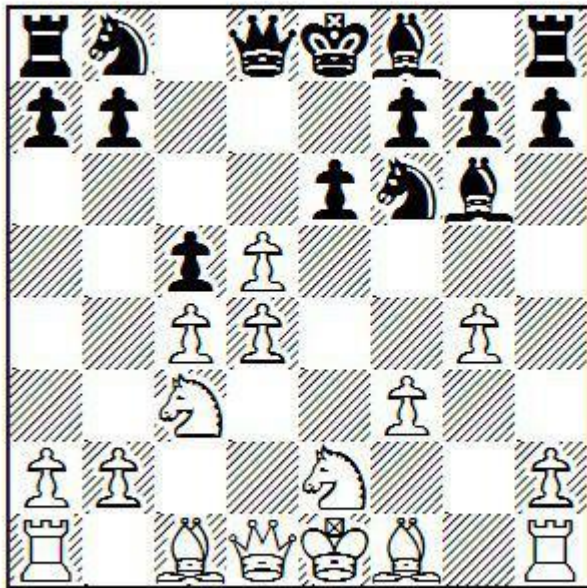
d) 8 dxc6?! Nxc6 9 Be3 Bd6 gives Black plenty of compensation for the pawn.

e) 8 Be3 (a good suggestion by Stefan Bucker) 8 ... exd5 (8 ... Na6 is met by 9 h4 h5 10 g5 Nd7 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bd3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 Ne5 14 Qe4 Nxc4 15 Nge2) 9 g5 Nfd7 10 cxd5 (or 10 Nxd5?! Nc6! with counterplay) 10 ... Be7 (now if 10 ... Na6 then 11 Bxa6 bxa6 12 Qe2 Be7 13 d6 Bxd6 14 dxc5 Be7 15 Rd1 Rc8 16 b4 0-0 17 h4 Re8 18 Kf1)



11 h4 (not 11 f4? 0-0 12 Qf3 f6! with strong counterplay; e.g. 13 d6 Bxd6 14 Qd5+ Bf7 15 Qxd6 Re8! with ... Re6 as a threat) 11 ... 0-0

12 Nge2 c4!? (12 ... f6? 13 h5 Bf7 14 g6 hxg6 15 hxg6 Bxg6 16 Nf4 wins; other lines are good for White too: 12 ... cxd4 13 Nxd4 Re8 14 Qd2, or 12 ... Re8 13 Kf2 cxd4 14 Bxd4, or 12 ... Nb6 13 h5 Bf5 14 Kf2 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 dxc5 Qe5 17 Qc1) 13 Nf4 Nb6 with a very complicated position in which objectively White should be better. Nevertheless, her king remains stranded, and should White's doubled, isolated d-pawns begin to drop off, her position would be in danger of complete collapse.



8 ... cxd4

Black has two tricky alternatives, but White maintains an advantage with precise play:

a) 8 ... Na6 9 h4! (other moves allow ... Nb4, while 9 a3 Bd6 should not leave Black unhappy) 9 ... Nb4 10 Kf2! (forced; 10 h5?? Bc2! 11 Qd2 Nd3+ wins) 10 ... Rc8 11 Kg2 and with a safe king and no imminent tactical dangers, White should be able to maintain a clear advantage.

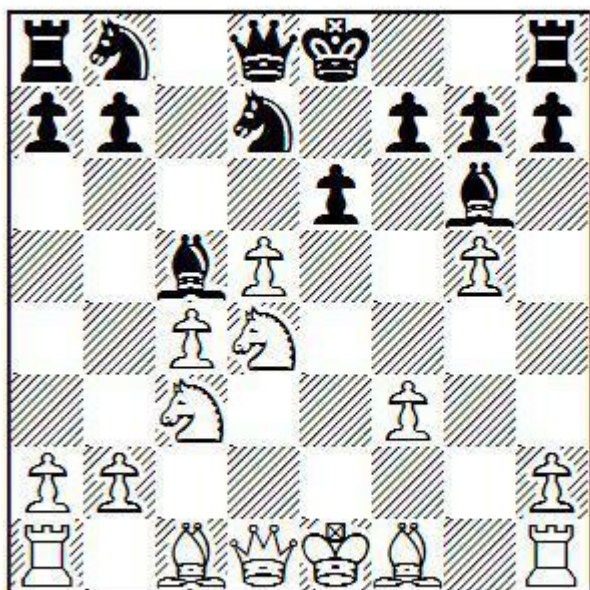
b) 8 ... exd5 9 g5! Nfd7 10 Nxd5 Bd6 gives White a pleasant choice: 11 h4!? (or 11 Bf4 Bxf4 12 Nexf4 0-0 13 h4 Nc6 14 dxc5 Nxc5 15 Kf2 and Black's compensation is not fully sufficient, thanks to White's strong outpost on d5) 11 ... 0-0 12 h5 Bf5 13 Bh3 Bxh3 14 Rxh3 Nc6 15 dxc5 and again, Black's compensation is insufficient.

The white king will find a home on f1, while the black king is hardly much safer in the face of White's pawn storm.

9 Nxd4 Bc5 10 g5!

After 10 Nb3 Bb4 11 g5 Nfd7 12 dxe6 (Bücker suggested 12 h4!?, when 12 ... Bh5 13 Be2 0-0 14 0-0 Bxc3!? 15 bxc3 Na6 offers some positional compensation) 12 ... fxe6 13 Bh3 0-0, Black has reasonable counterplay. The e6-pawn is a poisoned chalice, though White can keep a small advantage by ignoring it for the time being and completing her development.

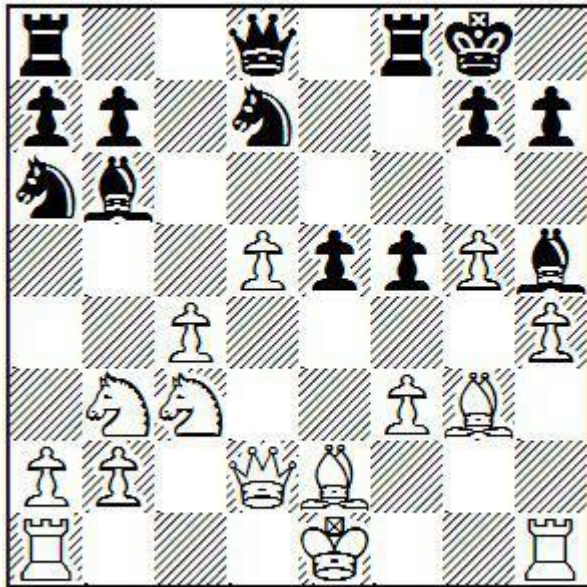
10 ... Nfd7



11 h4

11 Be3?? e5! wins a piece.

11 ... Bh5! 12 Nb3 Bb6 13 Bf4 0-0 14 Be2 e5 15 Bg3 Na6 16 Qd2 f5



Black's compensation is almost, if not quite, worth a pawn. She has activity on both sides of the board and excellent squares and lines for her minor pieces. White's king is still searching for a safe home – note that 17 0-0-0?? f4! wins a piece – but for the moment the centre remains closed and she is in no immediate danger. A complex struggle lies ahead, which should favour the player most comfortable in unbalanced positions.

With that, we come to the end of our discussion of the Correspondence Refutation, White's objectively strongest response to 3 d4 Bg4. You may query the point of so extensively analysing this rare variation, given that you are unlikely to face it over the board and that our final evaluation favours White. Indeed, I would encourage you *not* to spend time memorizing the many sidelines of this chapter, but instead play over the variations to familiarize yourself with the common motifs and manoeuvres for both colours. Also, pay attention to the positions at the end of each branch in which I give an evaluation. In these unorthodox and complex scenarios, being able to work out accurate evaluations becomes critical to handling the play. Improving this skill, simply by being more familiar with the lines and evaluations than your opponent, is an

important weapon in improving your practical chess results in general.

A second reason for the comprehensive analysis is more preparatory in nature. Though 5 g4 remains rare in tournament practice, there is every reason to expect this to change in the future. Should this variation become popular, these chapters represent the most thorough analysis ever published on it, and will serve to ensure that you will be better prepared than your opponent for the fight. I also hope that it can provide a solid basis for your own analysis and that of future researchers, and who knows what resources wait to be found. One thing is for sure: the final word has not yet been written.

Actually, we have come to the end of our discussion of White's options after 4 f3 as well. After all that excitement, we now turn our attention to more tranquil waters.

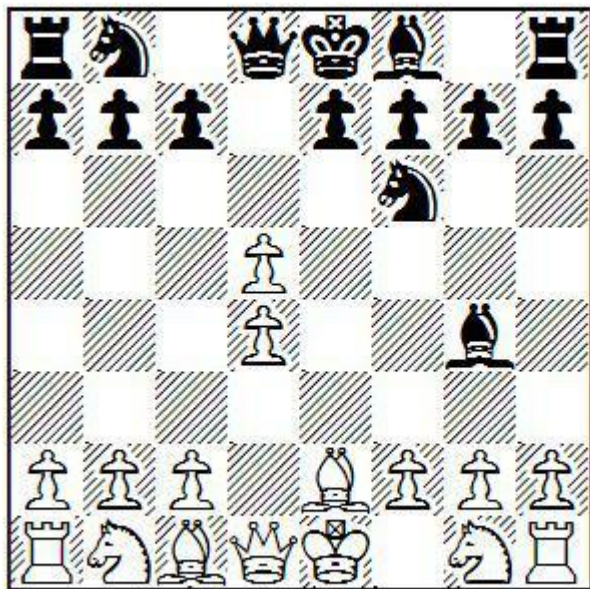
Chapter Five

The Wuss

Introduction

Wuss, n. A person regarded as weak, ineffectual, or overly fearful."

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Be2



Wimpy, but logical. This is the most common response to 3 ... Bg4, particularly at club levels. By exchanging off light-squared bishops, White seeks to suppress Black's attacking potential as well as hasten her own kingside development.

Black, for her part, does not have to be compliant. Natural development and kingside castling is sound and good enough for equality, but unless White is accurate, Black can instead opt to castle queenside. With the kings housed on opposite wings, an attacking race ensues in which Black's main battering ram is her g-pawn. A

typical combative set-up involves playing (after ... Bxe2) ... Qxd5, ... Nc6, ... e7-e6, ... 0-0-0, ... Bd6, ... Rhg8 and ... g7-g5-g4 etc. Despite White's fourth move being designed to tame the position, I am happy to report that Black's aggressive intentions cannot be underestimated!

Although this variation is not critical and immediately guarantees Black equal chances, the frequency with which you will encounter it demands that we pay it close attention. Become familiar with the themes and ideas of the Wuss, and you will be rewarded with easy games and cheap points.

Game 8

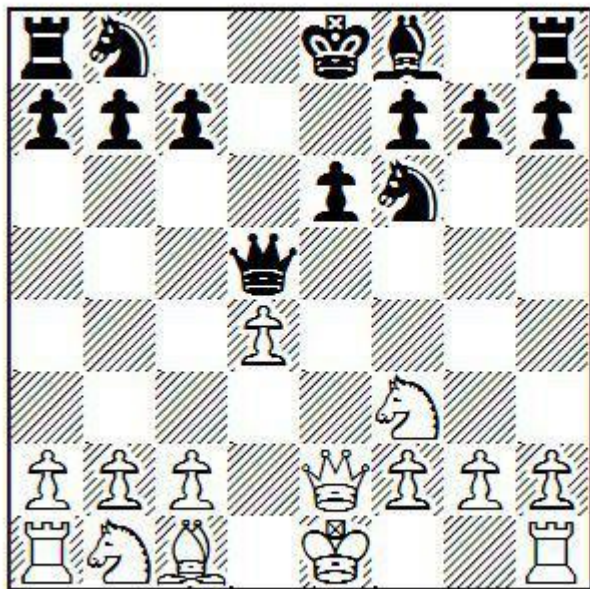
D.Bucher-D.Smerdon

Sydney 2007

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Be2

A very common move, though not at all dangerous. Still, due to its frequency over the board, I recommend spending a bit of time to understand the nuances of this variation.

4 ... Bxe2 5 Qxe2 Qxd5 6 Nf3 e6



This common pawn structure can occur from a Caro-Kann, a regular 2 ... Qxd5 Scandinavian, or a Rubinstein French, except that here Black has solved the issue of her

passive 'problem-piece', the light-squared bishop. White should play with some vigour at this point because, against quiet development, Black can consider castling queenside and launching a deceptively fast attack on the kingside.

7 0-0

Here 7 c4! Qf5 8 0-0! prevents Black developing her queen's knight as ... Nc6 can be met by d4-d5. Therefore, Black should prefer 8 ... Be7 and kingside castling with an equal game. 7 Nc3 Qh5 is just equal.

7 ... Nc6!

Now there is no reason to avoid the natural development of the queenside, as 8 c4?! runs into 8 ... Nxd4!.

8 Rd1 Qh5 9 c4 0-0-0!

Disappointing White's hopes of a quieter contest. Castling on opposite wings is almost always a green light for launching an attack, and this position is no exception.

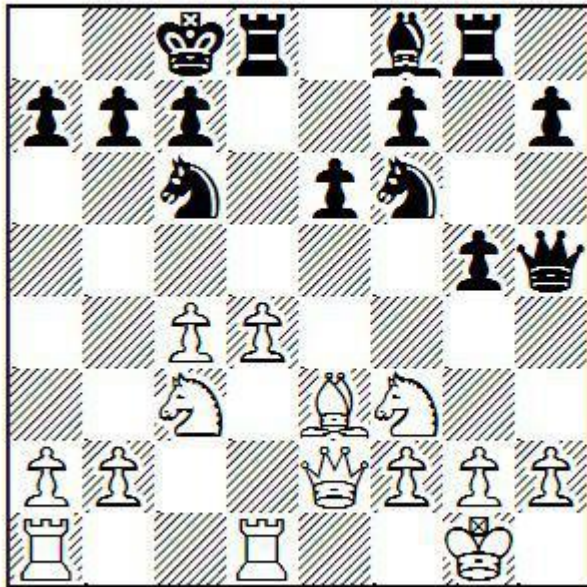
10 Nc3 Rg8!?

No prizes for guessing what Black's idea is behind this one. Nevertheless, 10 ... Kb8 was more accurate, preparing ... Rg8 without running into the note to White's next move.

11 Be3

Here 11 d5! would have been strong: 11 ... exd5 12 cxd5 Nb4 13 Bg5! Bd6 14 Rd4! with complicated play where White has the better of things.

11 ... g5!



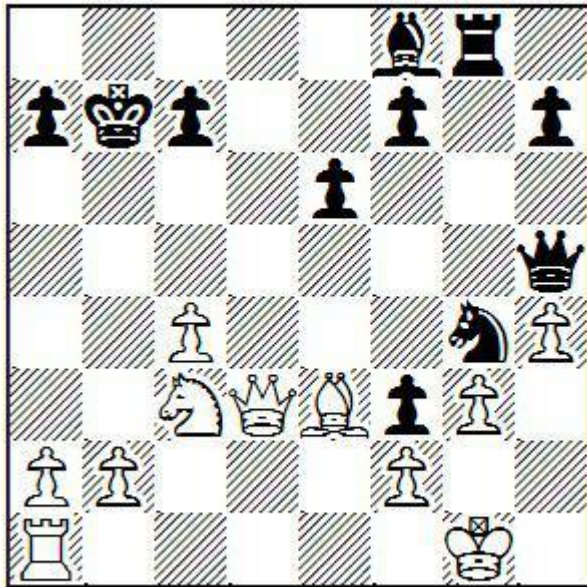
There is no time for hesitation when it comes to opposite-sided castling. Black's attack has clearly gotten a useful head start.

12 d5?!

White is slightly worse, being clearly behind in the attacking race, but this attempt to mix things up in the centre quickly backfires.

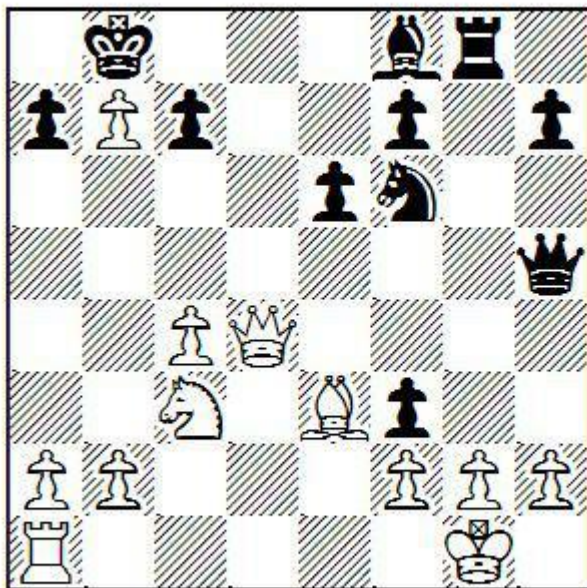
12 ... g4! 13 dxc6 Rxd1+?!

I should have been braver: 13 ... gxf3! 14 Rxd8+ Kxd8 15 Qd3+ (or 15 cxb7? Rxd8 16 Kf1 fxe2+ 17 Kxg2 Qg4+, followed by ... Qf3+ and ... Qxb7) 15 ... Kc8 16 cxb7+ Kxb7 wins, because 17 g3 Ng4 18 h4



runs into 18 ... Nxe3! 19 Qxe3 Rxc3+!! 20 fxc3 Bc5, winning the white queen.

14 Qxd1 gxf3 15 cxb7+ Kb8 16 Qd4!

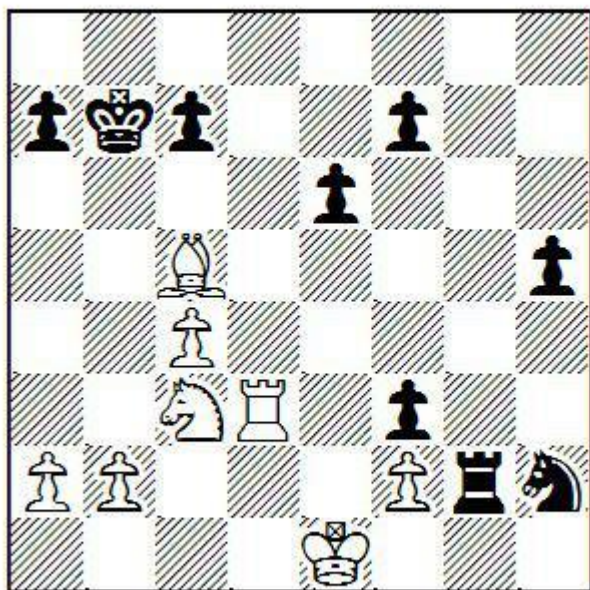


A necessary shot, finally beginning White's own attacking intentions.

16 ... Bc5! 17 Qxc5 Rg2+ 18 Kf1 Qxc5 19 Bxc5 Rxh2 20 Kg1 Rg2+ 21 Kf1 Rh2 22 Kg1 Rg2+ 23 Kf1 h5?!

What can one say about this? Objectively, I should probably have taken the draw, having missed an opportunity to end the game on move thirteen. With some poetic justice, however, Black's foolish bravery was rewarded.

24 Rd1 Ng4 25 Rd3 Nh2+ 26 Ke1 Kxb7



27 Bd4?

27 Nb5! would have unleashed a surprisingly fast mating attack, of the following style: 27 ... h4? 28 Rd7 h3 29 Rxc7+ Kb8 30 Bd6 Rg1+ 31 Kd2 Nf1+ 32 Kc3 h2 33 Nxa7 h1Q 34 Nc6+ Ka8 35 Ra7 mate.

27 ... h4 28 Be5? Ng4!

The tables turn again.

29 Bxc7 Rxf2 30 Bf4 e5 31 Rd7+ Kc6 32 Rxf7 Rg2 33 Be3 h3 34 Bxa7 h2 0-1

Black's kingside pawn storm, initiated all the way back on move ten, finally touches down.

Game 9

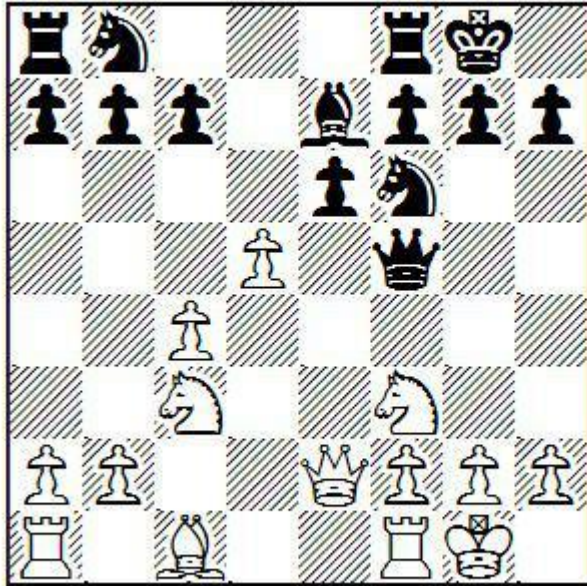
L.Moylan-D.Smerdon

Sydney 2003

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Be2 Bxe2 5 Qxe2 Qxd5 6 Nf3 e6 7 0-0 Be7

7 ... Nc6! is more accurate, preventing c2-c4 due to the weakness of the d4-pawn.

8 c4 Qf5 9 Nc3 0-0 10 d5!



The critical move. Otherwise, Black's position is solid and worry-free.

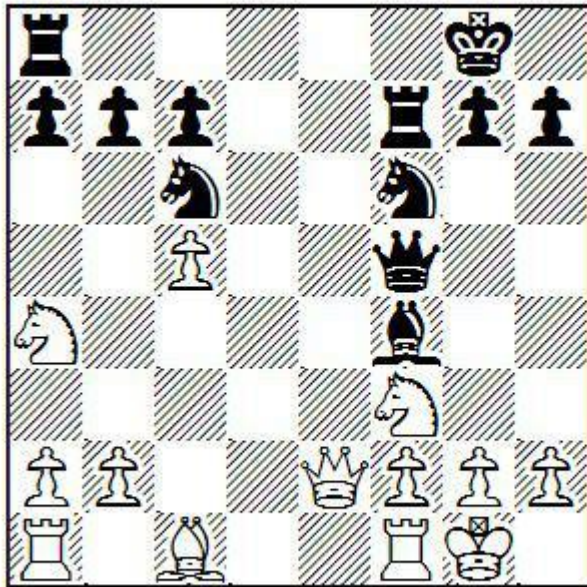
10 ... Bc5!

A great concept of Damaso's.

11 Na4!?

11 dxe6 Nc6! is the idea. Black is happy to sacrifice a pawn in exchange for rapid development and open lines. For example, 12 Be3 Rae8 13 Bxc5 (here 13 Nh4!? Qe5 14 exf7+ is more testing: 14 ... Rxf7 15 Rae1 Bb4 16 Nf3 Qf5 with compensation for Black, but practical tests are needed) 13 ... Qxc5 14 exf7+ Rxf7 15 Qc2 Qxc4 with equality, P.Leko-R.Damaso, Yerevan Olympiad 1996.

11 ... Bd6 12 c5 Bf4 13 dxe6 Nc6! 14 exf7+ Rxf7



White has snatched a pawn, at the cost of lapsed development and an offside knight.

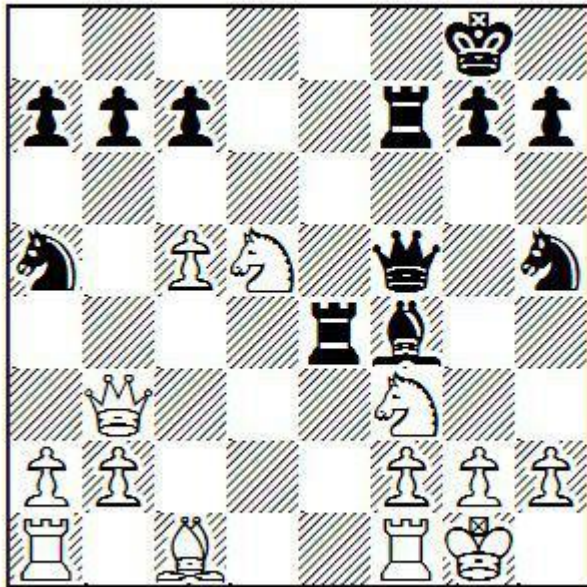
15 Nc3 Re8 16 Qc4 Nh5!?

Now Black's knight heads offside too, though this horse has a purpose.

17 Nd5?

17 Be3! is not the first move to come to a human's mind, but the engines are right about it nonetheless: 17 ... Ne5 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 19 Rad1! with an advantage to White.

17 ... Re4 18 Qb3 Na5!

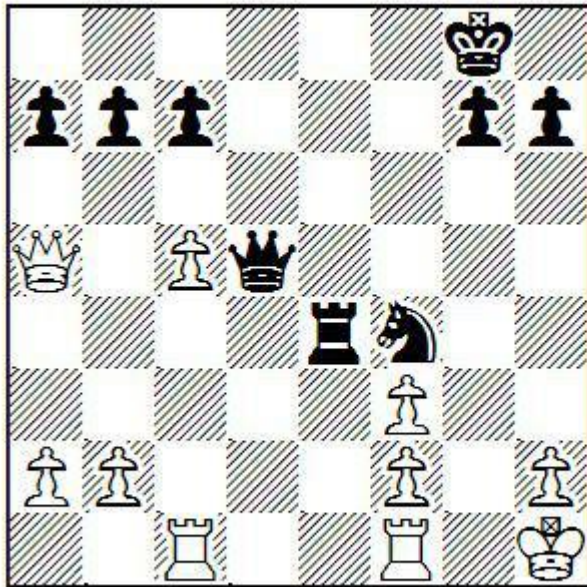


A second knight goes to the rim; suddenly all of Black's pieces are active and playing a useful role, while most of White's forces are still sleeping.

19 Qc3?

White could have stayed in the game with the computer-like sequence 19 Qd3 Rd7 20 Nd2! Bxd2 21 f3!!, though even then, after 21 ... Rxd5 22 fxe4 Rxd3 23 Rxf5 Nf6, Black is clearly better.

19 ... Qxd5 20 Qxa5 Bxc1 21 Raxc1 Rxf3! 22 gxf3 Nf4! 23 Kh1



23 ... Re1!!

The culmination of Black's attacking strategy. The rook severs the white forces in two, dramatically imposing itself with devastating effect.

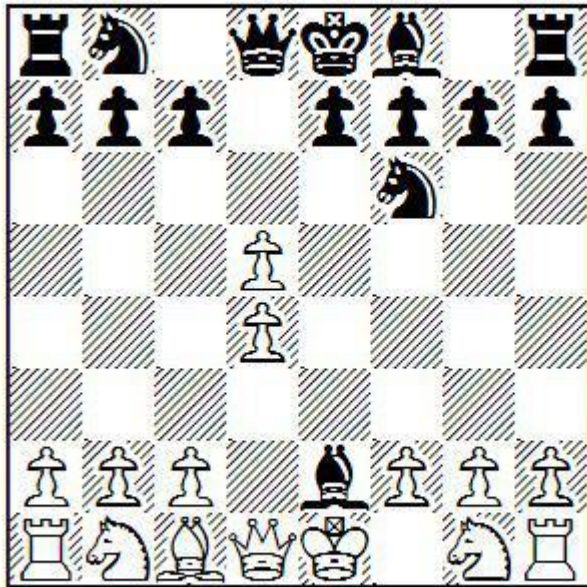
24 Qc3 Qg5 25 Qc4+ Kh8 26 Qxf4

The only way to stave off mate.

26 ... Rxf1+ 27 Rxf1 Qxf4 28 Kg2 Qg5+ 29 Kh1 Qxc5 30 Rd1 h5 0-1

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Be2 Bxe2



White should now take with the queen if she has any ambitions for an opening advantage, but the knight recapture is quite often seen, particularly at lower levels.

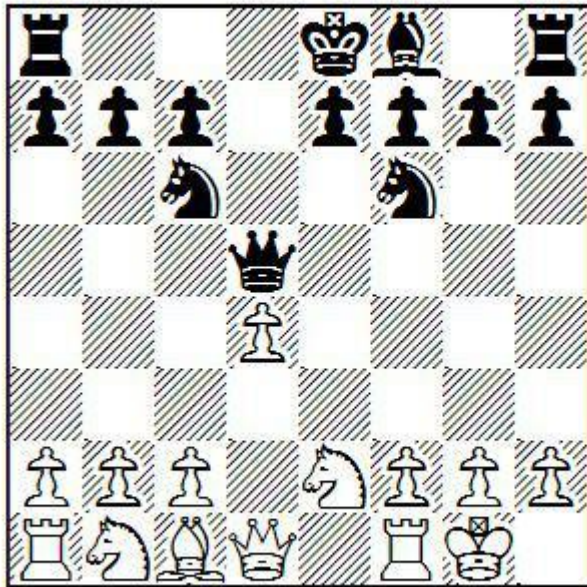
A: 5 Nxe2

B: 5 Qxe2

A: 5 Nxe2

Unambiguously inferior to the queen recapture, though seen in almost two out of every five Wusses in practice.

5 ... Qxd5 6 0-0 Nc6!



An interesting variant of the mainline Wuss has arisen. Note that Black doesn't have to fear a quick c2-c4 advance in this line, which means that ... e7-e6 can be delayed in place of the more active queen's knight development. As a general rule, Black can usually castle queenside and play for a kingside attack or a quick ... e7-e5, unless White swiftly brings a knight to f3 via d2. This extra bolstering of the kingside is often enough to give White's attack the edge in the case of opposite-sided castling, so in these cases Black should castle kingside and develop normally in the centre.

The immediate 6 ... e6?! is more passive, although 7 Nd2 c5 8 Nf3?! (8 c4!) 8 ... Nc6 9 Nf4 Qf5 was already more pleasant for Black in D.Hamelink-D.Smerdon, Tilburg 2006.

7 c3

Other moves:

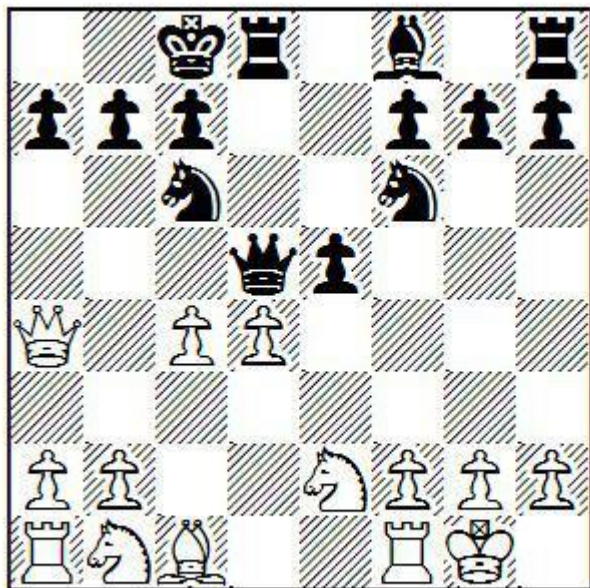
a) 7 Be3 should be met by 7 ... e6, intending ... Bd6, ... 0-0 and ... Rad8, answering c2-c4 with ... Qh5. Queenside castling is dangerous here: 7 ... 0-0-0?! 8 Nd2 e6 9 c4 Qh5 10 Nf3 Bd6?! 11 c5! Be7 12 b4! e5 13 Qa4! with what should have been an overwhelming attack in P.R.Dissanayake-D.Smerdon, Asian Student Championship, Negombo 2003.

b) 7 Nbc3 Qh5 8 Bf4 (instead, 8 Ng3 Qxd1 9 Rxd1 0-0-0 10 Be3 e6 leads to an endgame that is slightly more pleasant for Black, and 8 Qd3 0-0-0 9 Nf4 Qa5 10 Be3 e6! 11 a3 Bd6 12 b4 Qf5! is even more favourable; while 8 Nf4 Qf5! 9 d5 0-0-0 10 Qe2, A.Kulashko-P.X.Wang, Auckland Zonal 2005, and now 10 ... Nd4! 11 Qc4 e5! 12 dxe6 b5! 13 Qd3 fxe6 leaves Black with a clear advantage) 8 ... 0-0-0 9 Qc1 e6 10 Qe3 already favoured Black in A.Sharovatova-S.Krivoshey, Rymarov 1999, who could have launched a powerful attack immediately with 10 ... g5!.

7 ... e5! 8 Qa4

8 dxe5 Nxe5! should lead to another pleasant ending for Black, since the careless 9 Nd4? 0-0-0! 10 Qa4 Bc5 instead gifts her a clear advantage, J.Siljander-P.Terasti, Oulu 2002.

8 ... 0-0-0 9 c4



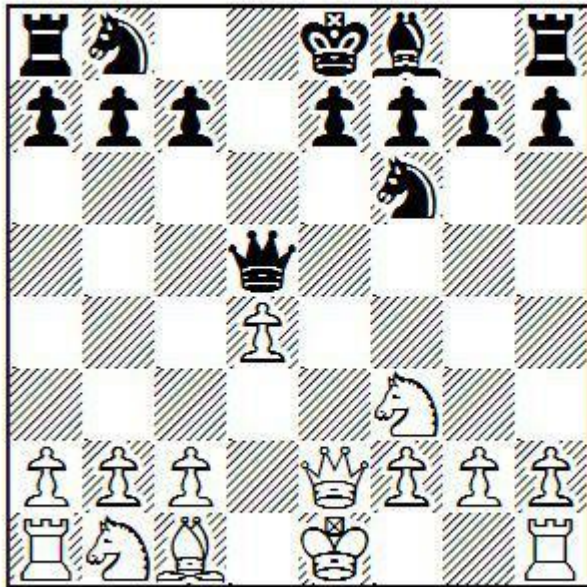
9 ... Qd7!?

A slight improvement over 9 ... Qa5 10 Qxa5 Nxa5 11 dxe5 Ng4, which is also equal, Hen.Seifert-S.Shilov, Katy Rybackie 2009.

10 d5 Nd4 11 Qd1 Nf5 12 Nbc3 h5!

With chances for both sides.

B: 5 Qxe2 Qxd5 6 Nf3

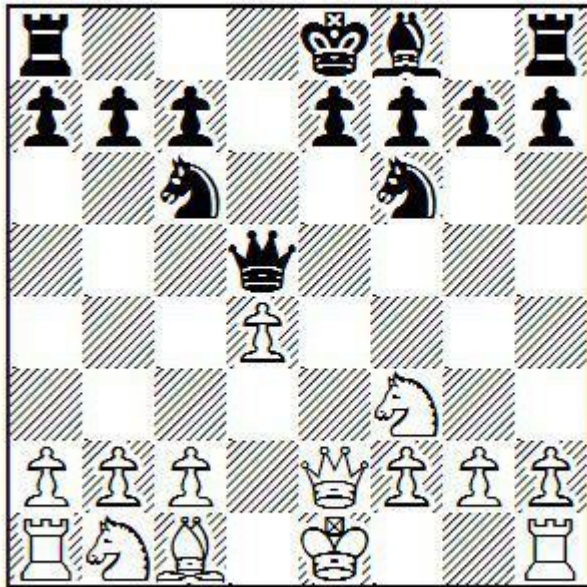


Now Black has a choice. I have always preferred the calm 6 ... e6, keeping an eye over the d5-square, though the alternative is quite playable.

B1: 6 ... Nc6

B2: 6 ... e6

B1: 6 ... Nc6



Equally as popular as 6 ... e6, and famously used by Shirov to beat Svidler. But note that it is only objectively playable if Black is prepared to go into a (very slightly) worse endgame.

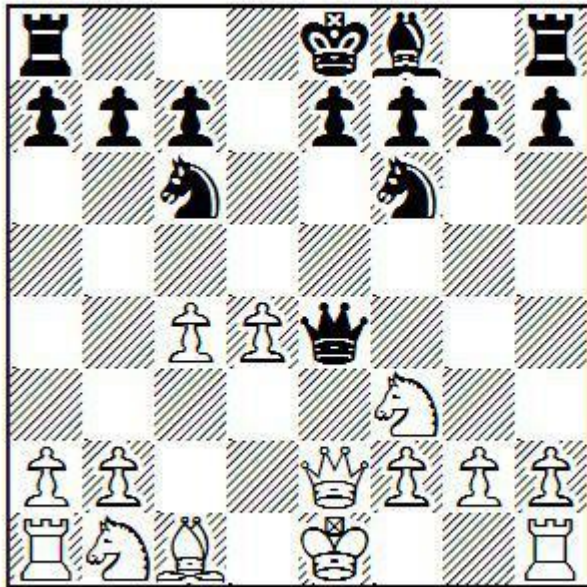
7 c4!

After 7 Nc3?! Qh5 8 Bg5? Nxd4! 9 Nxd4 Qxg5, Black went on to convert his extra pawn in P.Svidler-A.Shirov, Tilburg 1996. Perhaps the biggest scalp to date for the Portuguese!

7 ... Qe4!

An important nuance! I have it on good authority that this move is "good enough for a draw in correspondence chess". Of course, that may not be good enough for you, and in fact I prefer the positions after 6 ... e6 myself. Having said that, this line is very playable.

7 ... Qf5?! looks like the consistent follow-up, but after 8 0-0 (or 8 Nc3 0-0-0 9 d5!) 8 ... e6 (or 8 ... 0-0-0 9 d5!) 9 d5!, White is clearly better.



8 Be3

Instead:

a) 8 Nc3?! Qxe2+ 9 Kxe2 e6 is equal.

b) 8 Qxe4 Nxe4 9 0-0 is the endgame I alluded to earlier, which is marginally better for White. Nevertheless, Black should be able to reach virtual equality after 9 ... Nd6, 9 ... g6, or even 9 ... e6 10 Re1 Nd6 11 d5 Nb4!, M.Harabor-H.H.Baer, correspondence 1995.

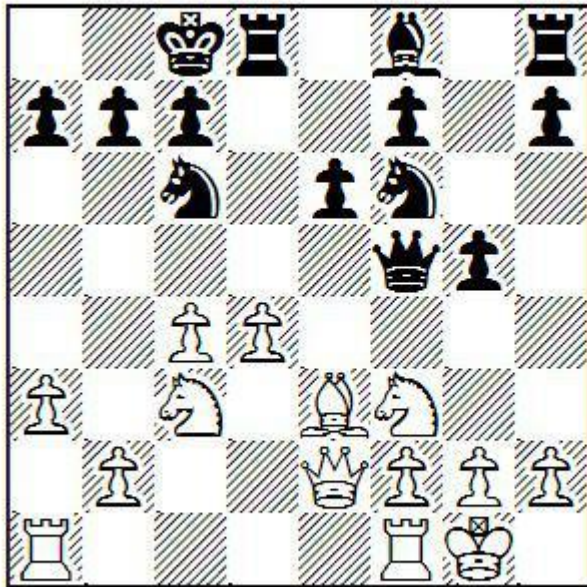
8 ... e6 9 0-0 Qf5!

In one sense, Black has wasted a tempo compared with 6 ... e6. However, the bishop on e3 blocks the e-file and so prevents White from making the typical d4-d5 advance.

10 Nc3 0-0-0!?

Or 10 ... Be7 11 h3 0-0-0 12 a3 Ne4 (12 ... g5!? would tempt me) 13 Rfe1 Rhg8 14 Nxe4 Qxe4 15 b4 Bf6 16 Rad1 g5 with chances for both sides, H.Vera Ruiz-P.Aguilar Gomez, correspondence 2008.

11 a3 g5!



An interesting, aggressive attempt to add some spice into this line. It was played by the creative correspondence player Ruslan Tleptsok, whose game continued:

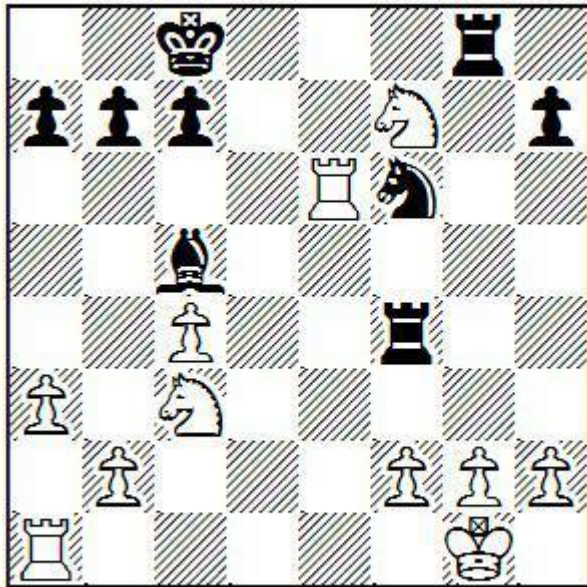
12 Nxg5

12 b4 g4 13 Ng5 Qg6 is very comfortable for Black.

12 ... Nxd4 13 Bxd4 Rxd4 14 Nxf7 Rg8 15 Rfe1

15 Ne5? Nh5! gives Black a very strong attack.

15 ... Rf4! 16 Qxe6+ Qxe6 17 Rxe6 Bc5!



Black has sufficient compensation for the pawns – always an impressive achievement in modern correspondence chess!

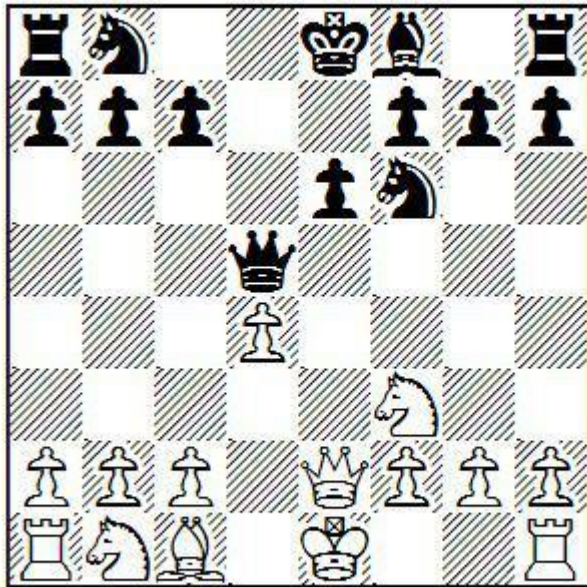
18 Re2 Ng4 19 Ne4 Nxf2 20 Nxf2 Rxf7 21 b4 Bd4 22 Raa2

22 Rd1 c5 23 b5 Rf3! is slightly better for Black.

22 ... c5! 23 g3 Rg4 24 Rac2! cxb4 25 axb4 Rc7 26 Re8+ Kd7 27 Rf8 Kd6 28 Rd8+ Ke6 29 Rb8 b6 30 Re8+ Kf7 31 Ra8 ½-½

F.Solf-R.Tleptsok, correspondence 2009.

B2: 6 ... e6



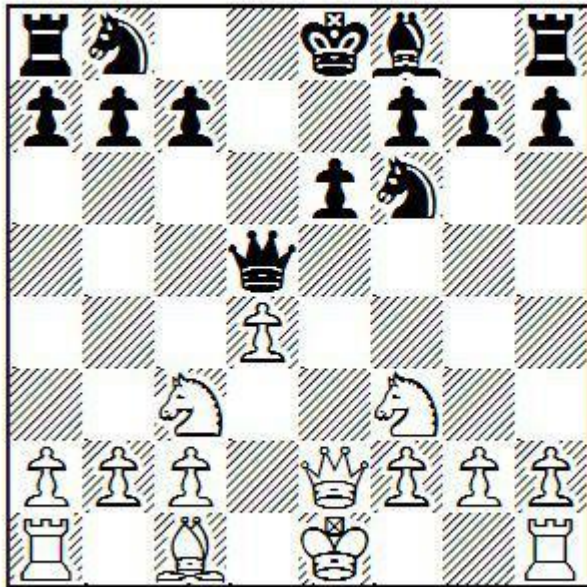
Somewhat surprisingly, this is a critical moment for the Wuss. White players often prefer to defer the decision over c2-c4 or Nc3 by playing 7 0-0 first, but this gives Black an important option in 7 ... Nc6 (intending 8 c4 Nxd4!). Instead, White should make her choice immediately, and I believe 7 c4 is best so that the threat of d4-d5 forces Black to postpone the development of the b8-knight. However, Black secures an equal game here, too, with a couple of accurate moves.

B21: 7 Nc3

B22: 7 0-0

B23: 7 c4!

B21: 7 Nc3



A natural developing move, but the knight blocks the advance of the white c-pawn, without which White cannot hope to threaten the black structure.

7 ... Qh5

Interestingly, 7 ... Qa5!? may be even better. Black's queen faces little danger here without White's king's bishop or a pawn on c4 to control the light squares.

8 Bf4

Other moves:

a) 8 Ne5 Qxe2+ 9 Kxe2 Nbd7 with an equal endgame, C.Astengo-S.Krivoshey, Internet (blitz) 2002.

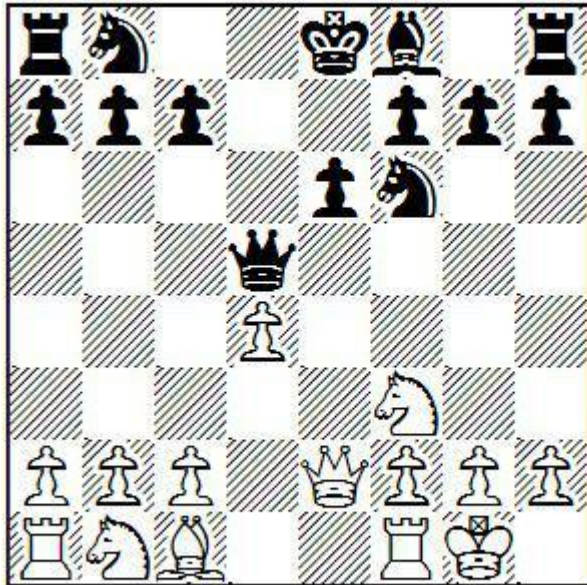
b) 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Bf4 0-0-0 is rather aimless play by White. With the c-pawn back on c2, White has less control over the centre and her queenside attacking chances are also much slower. Black has unsurprisingly scored very well from this position.

c) 8 Qb5+ takes the definition of "Wuss" to a whole new level, but don't let this scare you! After 8 ... Qxb5 9 Nxb5 Bd6!, the ending is not as dull as it may appear, especially if Black ends up in a knight vs. bishop situation. For instance, Emi.Rodriguez-M.Jorquera Cahuin, Dos Hermanas, Internet (blitz) 2004, continued 10 Nxd6+ cxd6 11 Bf4 Ke7! and Black was already slightly better.

8 ... c6 9 0-0 Be7

Black has a solid position in which, given the absence of c2-c4, she faces no problems and can finish her development hassle-free, T.Dai Van Nguyen-T.Vojta, Tatranske Zruby 2012.

B22: 7 0-0



This is inaccurate for two reasons. Firstly, Black could now play 7 ... Bd6 8 c4 Qh5, threatening ... Bxh2+, while avoiding the difficulties of 7 c4 Qh5?! below. However, more importantly ...

7 ... Nc6!

... prevents 8 c4? on account of 8 ... Nxd4!, winning a pawn – a trap that, amazingly, Sergei Krivoshey's opponents have managed to fall into four times!

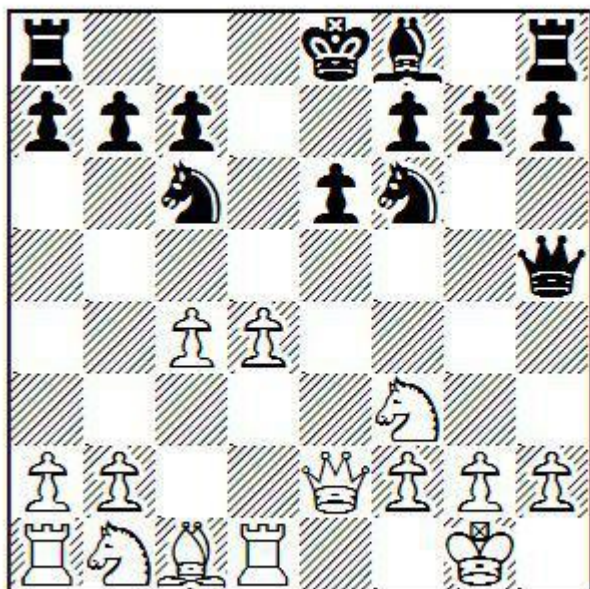
Alternatively, 7 ... Bd6 8 c4 Qh5 9 Nc3 Nc6 10 h3 0-0-0 11 Be3 g5!? was the historic encounter, Ye Jiangchuan-R.Damaso, Macao 1996, which we saw at the outset of this book (*Inspirational Game #1*).

8 Rd1

Not 8 c4?? due to 8 ... Nxd4 9 Nxd4 Qxd4 with a clear advantage to Black, as in V.Jerozkij-S.Krivoshey, Minsk 1998 (among others!).

Note that 8 Nc3 cannot be answered in the same way, because 8 ... Nxd4? 9 Nxd4 Qxd4 10 Qb5+! leaves Black helpless. Instead, 8 ... Qh5 transposes to 8 0-0 Nc6 in line B21 above, and 8 ... Qf5 is also possible.

8 ... Qh5 9 c4



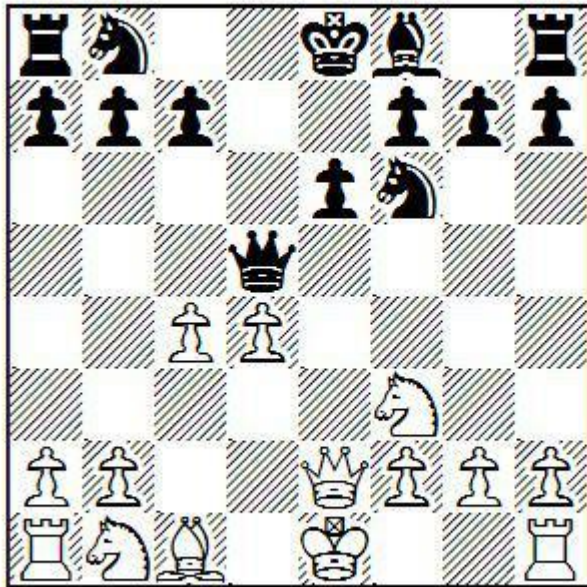
9 ... 0-0-0!?

9 ... Bd6 10 Nc3 0-0 is a safe alternative.

10 Nc3 Rg8 11 Be3?! g5!

With an attack, as seen in Game 8 (Bucher-Smerdon).

B23: 7 c4!



Definitely the most testing continuation; in fact, I would go so far as to say it is the *only* testing continuation in the Wuss.

7 ... Qf5

7 ... Qh5?! is the move Black wants to play, angling for a transposition to Ye-Damaso. Unfortunately, White can circumvent Black's plans with 8 Nc3!. A key point is that 8 ... Bd6? loses to 9 c5! Be7 10 Qb5+ (as in M.Sonter-P.Blazkova, Olomouc 2009), so Black has to adopt an inferior set-up with 8 ... Bb4 or 8 ... Nbd7, in either case accepting a slight disadvantage.

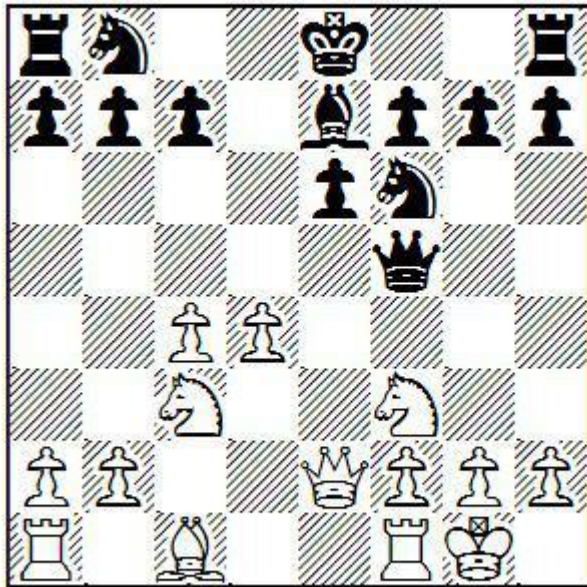
8 0-0!

This accurate sequence obliges Black to rethink her natural plan of ... Nc6, ... Bd6, ... 0-0-0 etc, because of the threat of d4-d5.

8 ... Be7

Black changes plans and prepares to castle kingside. The game now takes on a less aggressive nature. Not 8 ... Nc6? due to 9 d5! and White is clearly better, Vad.Akhmadeev-D.Rodin, Voronezh 2000; while 8 ... Bd6? 9 c5! is also very unpleasant.

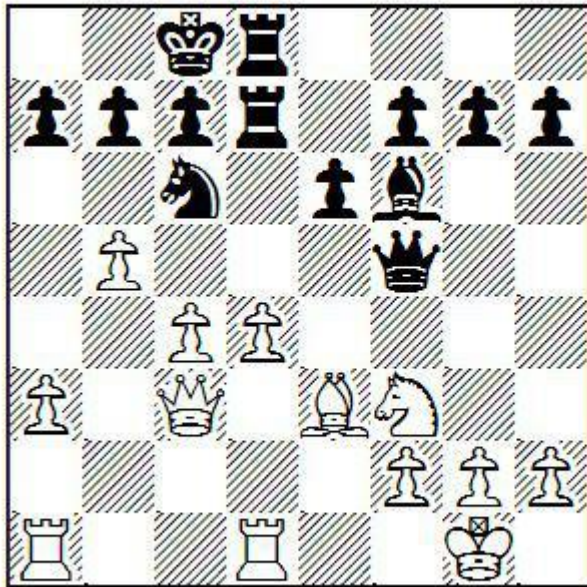
9 Nc3



9 ... 0-0

Interestingly, 9 ... Nc6!? is still possible and might be objectively best, though Black needs to continue accurately. With a bishop on e7, Black's kingside attack is now slightly, but critically, slower. Black can still consider the typical ... g7-g5 if White plays passively, often combined (should White play Be3) with a timely ... Ne4 to exchange a pair of knights.

However, kingside attacking plans are liable to simply be blown off the board if White quickly begins her own attack by preparing b2-b4. In this case, Black should switch to playing in the centre; fortunately, it seems Black can create counterplay just in time: 10 Rd1 0-0-0 (not 10 ... a6? 11 d5! with a clear advantage, N.Fercec-Br.Filipovic, Pula 2000) 11 a3 (11 Be3 is carelessly slow: 11 ... Rhg8! 12 a3 g5! 13 b4 and now 13 ... Ne4! secures Black her share of the chances) 11 ... Rd7 (or even 11 ... g5!?) 12 b4 Rhd8 13 Be3 Ne4! (again this move!) 14 Qc2 Nxc3 15 Qxc3 Bf6! 16 b5



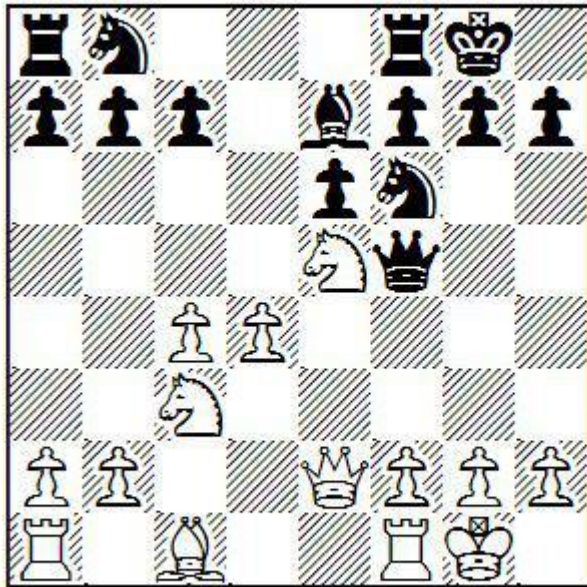
16 ... Nxd4!! (the pins guarantee that Black regains her material)
 17 Rxd4 (the only move) 17 ... Bxd4 18 Bxd4 e5! 19 Be3 Rd1+ 20
 Ne1 Qd3 and Black is pressing.

10 d5!

The critical move.

Passive play with 10 b3 is barely enough for equality: 10 ... Nc6 11
 Bb2 Rad8 12 Rad1 Rd7 13 a3 Rfd8 and the pressure on d4 is
 becoming extremely uncomfortable. For example, 14 Rd2 g5! 15
 Rfd1 g4! 16 Ne5?! Nxe5 17 dxe5 Rxd2 18 Rxd2 Rxd2 19 Qxd2 Ne4!
 with a clear advantage to Black, Ra.Song-D.Smerdon, Canberra
 2004.

But 10 Ne5!? is a devious attempt to trap Black's queen via a
 timely g2-g4. Remember this one!



For instance, 10 ... c5?! 11 g4! Nxg4 12 Qxg4 Qxg4+ 13 Nxg4 cxd4 14 Ne2 with a clear advantage; or 10 ... h6 11 g4! Qh7 12 Bf4 and White is better on account of her extra space.

The best response is 10 ... h5! and if 11 h3, as in T.Wedberg-H.Kallio, Stockholm 1999, then 11 ... Nc6! is the cleanest way of equalizing. Black shows no fear of the doubled pawns after 12 Nxc6 bxc6, which will serve a useful defensive role and can often be mended through a timely ... c6-c5 in any case.

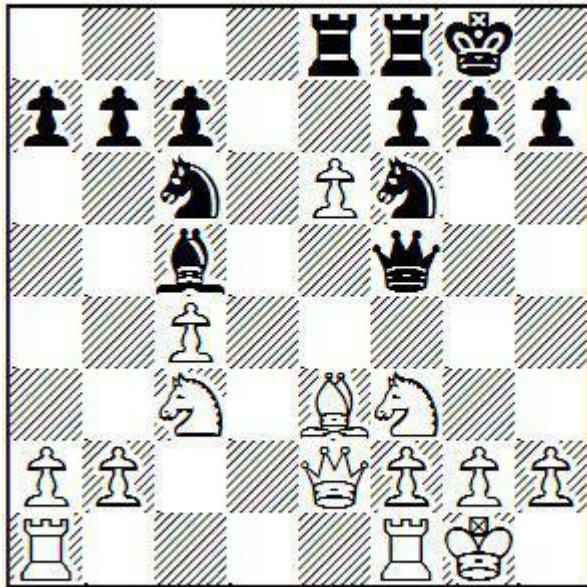
10 ... Bc5

10 ... Bd6 is passive, but playable. After 11 dxe6 Qxe6 12 Qxe6 fxe6 13 Re1 Re8, White is slightly better in the endgame, though Black should be able to hold without undue suffering.

11 dxe6

Alternatively, 11 Na4 Bd6 12 c5 Bf4!? was Game 9 (Moylan-Smerdon); while after 11 Nb5 Na6 12 dxe6 Rae8 13 Nbd4, the players apparently agreed a draw in Ne.Johnson-S.Grayland, correspondence 1998.

11 ... Nc6! 12 Be3 Rae8!



13 Bxc5

Instead:

a) 13 Nd5?! was P.Sott-B.Dekker, Pardubice 2009, and here the improvement 13 ... Rxe6! 14 Nxc7?! Re7! 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 cxd5 Qxd5 is clearly better for Black.

b) 13 exf7+ Rxf7 14 Nh4 Qc8! gives Black good compensation, S.Grayland-F.Clough, correspondence 1998.

c) 13 Nh4!? Qe5 14 exf7+ is the critical and as-yet unplayed test of Black's pawn sacrifice. After 14 ... Rxf7 15 Rae1 Bb4 16 Nf3 Qf5, Black clearly has compensation, but it's an open question as to whether this is sufficient or not.

13 ... Qxc5 14 exf7+ Rxf7 15 Qc2 Qxc4

With equality in P.Leko-R.Damaso, Yerevan Olympiad 1996.

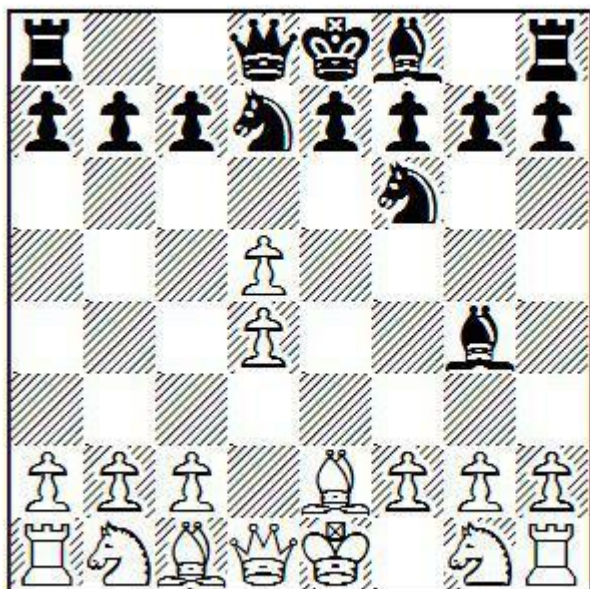
Despite Black's excellent score in this variation, my gut feeling is that the novelty 13 Nh4!? favours White, so Black should probably prefer 9 ... Nc6!?

Chapter Six

The Lusophobe

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ Nbd7 5 Be2!



This relatively rare retreat is an anti-Portuguese system that deserves your close attention. The clever switchback by the bishop, taking advantage of Black's hemmed-in queen, dampens Black's short-term attacking chances.

The attraction of 5 Be2 lies in its simplicity: White heads for a small but stable advantage by immediately returning the pawn, while significantly reducing Black's counterplay. While this could never be deemed an outright refutation, it is certainly a powerful practical choice for White, who more often than not is looking for a simple, theory-free panacea to our weapon.

At first, it might seem like White has just wasted a tempo compared to the Wuss (4 Be2). However, things are not so simple. In

those variations Black recaptures the pawn on d5 with her queen, which usually finds an active post on f5 or h5. Her knight will jump to c6, where it will pressure d4, support ... e7-e5 and facilitate queenside castling.

By tempting the black knight to d7 first, White circumvents this natural development. Black must now recapture on d5 with her king's knight, which will invariably be forced to retreat back to f6 in any case. Moreover, the traffic jam on the d-file will mean that Black has to evacuate the king to the kingside and try to arrange her pieces in a somewhat cramped fashion on the first three ranks. In fact, compared to 4 Be2, Black often finds herself lacking in both space and time.

Once again, I must confess that I have tried to scare you into taking careful notice of this chapter. So, now to the good news. As you might have already guessed, the resulting positions are incredibly underexplored. With the exception of this book, there is practically no theory on this variation, which is excellent news for two important reasons: 1. You will be much better prepared to tackle the subtleties of the game; and 2. White has to play extremely accurately to cause us any problems.

Furthermore, without compromising on quality, I have chosen to focus our repertoire on lines involving pawn sacrifices, material imbalances and complex, unorthodox structures. I have done this in order to maximize the practical advantages of our familiarity with the variation, and to give our opponents every opportunity to err.

The bottom line is: Don't feel disheartened if you see 5 Be2 on your board. With solid preparation and a sensible approach, you should see your practical results flourish. We are playing for fun and for fire, to balance risk and return. After all, that's our philosophy, remember?

Game 10

T.Hommeles-I.Rausis

French Team Championship 2008

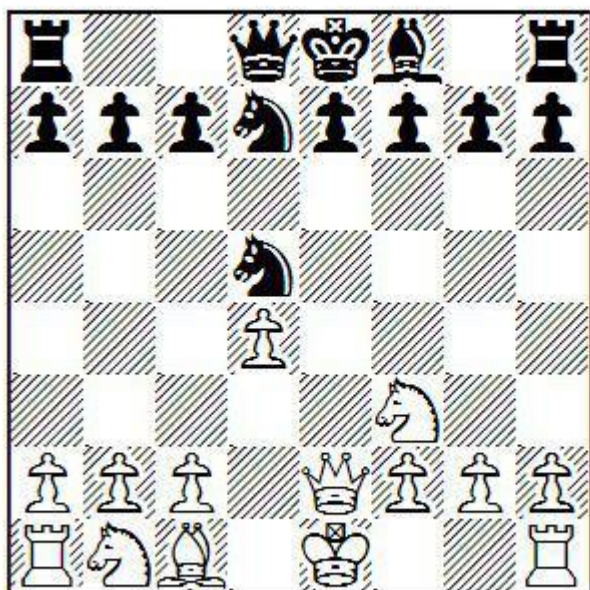
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ Nbd7 5 Be2!

Of all of White's low-theory options, this is one of the best. White denies Black the active possibilities that come with recapturing on d5 with the queen and, consequently, is happy to escape the opening with a small space advantage. Black can usually equalize without too many problems, but it is true that life will generally be a little more passive than we are used to in our opening.

5 ... Bxe2 6 Qxe2

6 Nxe2 should be met by 6 ... Nxd5 followed by ... e7-e6, developing the king's bishop somewhere (usually d6) and castling kingside, with equality.

6 ... Nxd5 7 Nf3



7 ... e6

7 ... g6!? is an interesting and more active option for Black. This line involves offering to sacrifice the e7-pawn, should White be interested. Check out the theory section for further details.

8 c4?!

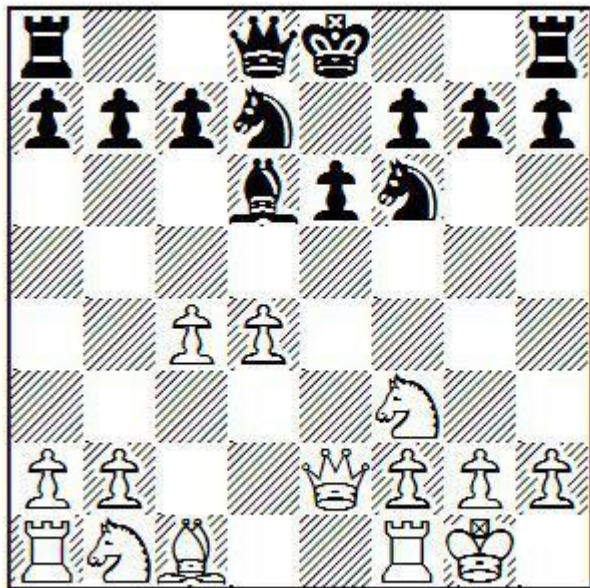
8 0-0! is better – see below.

8 ... N5f6?!

Mutual inaccuracies, after which we transpose to the main line. Here 8 ... Bb4+! is a favourable exchange for Black, who is after all

the one with less space: 9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10 Nbx d2 N5f6 11 d5 0-0! 12 dxe6 Re8 13 Ng5 fxe6 14 0-0 Nc5! with equality.

9 0-0 Bd6



10 Rd1

In my experience, players who choose these sort of unambitious variations with White are also the type to opt for simple developing moves like this, rather than more forcing lines, at least until the opening is over. Black has no real problems against this approach. The two central pawn thrusts are White's critical options, though Black is okay in any case:

a) 10 d5 0-0! 11 dxe6 Qe7! 12 Re1 Qxe6 13 Qxe6 fxe6 14 Rxe6 Nc5! with excellent compensation for the pawn.

b) 10 c5! Be7 11 Nc3 0-0 12 Bf4 is very slightly better for White, although the weakness of the d4-pawn and d5-square guarantee Black a fairly easy life.

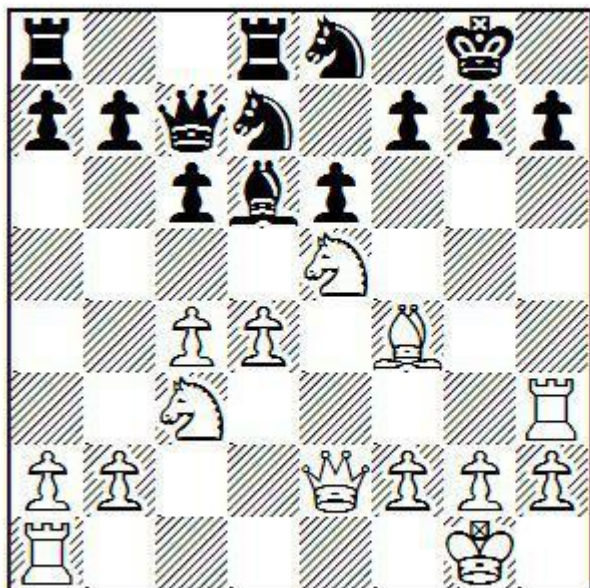
10 ... 0-0 11 Nc3 c6 12 Ne5 Qc7

Very solid. Black would really be feeling the pinch if she still had her light-squared bishop hemmed in on c8, but in the current position the only requirement to secure equality is patience.

13 Bf4 Rfd8 14 Rd3

Preparing a rook lift to the kingside.

14 ... Ne8 15 Rh3



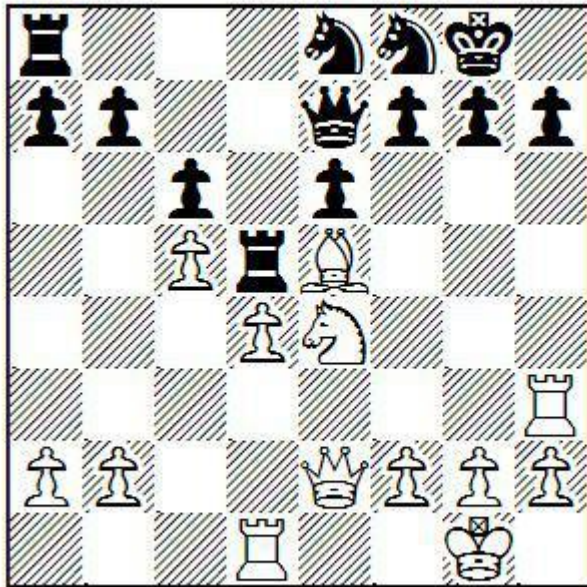
15 ... Nf8

15 ... Bxe5 16 dxe5 Nf8! was a more forceful option. Seeing as the white rook has abandoned the centre, now is the moment to open the d-file. White's attack is toothless against the pair of defensive knights: 17 Re1! (17 Ne4 Ng6 18 Bg3 Rd4 is slightly better for Black) 17 ... Ng6 18 Bc1 Rd4 gives Black sufficient counterplay; e.g. 19 Be3 Rd7 20 f4 Rad8 21 g4 Rd3 22 Rf1 Qa5! 23 Nd5 R8xd5 24 cxd5 Qxd5 with excellent compensation for the exchange.

16 c5 Bxe5 17 Bxe5 Qe7

Alternatively, 17 ... Qd7 18 Ne4 (or 18 Rd1 Ng6 with equality) 18 ... f6!, targeting d4, was possible, since 19 Bd6 f5! 20 Bxf8 fxe4 21 Bd6 Nxd6 22 cxd6 Qxd6 23 Qxe4 h6 is just equal.

18 Ne4 Rd5 19 Rd1?!



19 ... Rad8?!

Black had an excellent option here in 19 ... Ng6! 20 Qh5 (20 f4 Rad8 is also more comfortable for Black) 20 ... h6 21 Re3 b6! with a slight advantage, whereas 21 Nc3?! loses a pawn to 21 ... Rxe5 22 dxe5 Nf4 23 Qf3 Nxh3+ 24 Qxh3 Qxc5.

20 Nc3!

White wisely decides not to offer any more chances, and forces a draw against the GM.

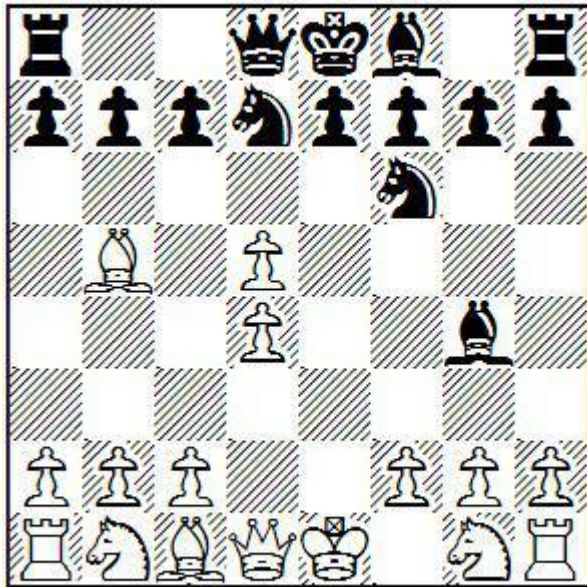
20 ... R5d7 21 Ne4 Rd5

Even 21 ... Ng6!? 22 Nd6 Nxd6 23 Bxd6 Rxd6 24 cxd6 Qxd6 is reasonably safe for Black due to the weakness of d4. But there is no reason to play this way unless one is a far more substantial rating favourite! (The two players were 2390 and 2520 respectively.)

22 Nc3 R5d7 23 Ne4 Rd5 24 Nc3 ½-½

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ Nbd7



5 Be2!

Before we continue with the main Lusophobe, a quick look at White's other fifth-move alternatives:

a) 5 f3 is in fact the most common continuation, transposing to the Jadoul after 5 ... Bf5.

b) 5 Ne2 is too passive and leaves the bishop on b5 feeling a little exposed: 5 ... Nxd5 6 c4?! c6! 7 Ba4 N5b6 8 Bb3 e5! gave Black a very good game in T.Beil-S.Krivoshey, Schwäbisch Gmünd 2003. Actually, Black can do even better after the forcing sequence 7 ... Bxe2! 8 Qxe2 Qa5+ 9 Bd2 Qxa4 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 Nc3 Qxd4 12 Nb5 Qe5 13 Qxe5 Nxe5 14 Nc7+ Kd7 15 Nxa8 e6 with excellent chances to win in the endgame. With two strong central pawns for the exchange (after the knight on a8 is inevitably recaptured), it's no wonder that the engines prefer Black.

c) 5 Nf3 Nxd5 6 0-0 c6!? (or 6 ... e6 7 h3 Bh5 8 c4 N5f6 and White will have to waste some time withdrawing the b5-bishop, leading to an equal position) 7 Be2 Qc7 gives Black a comfortable game reminiscent of line B3 in Section Four, with the added bonus of having already developed her light-squared bishop.

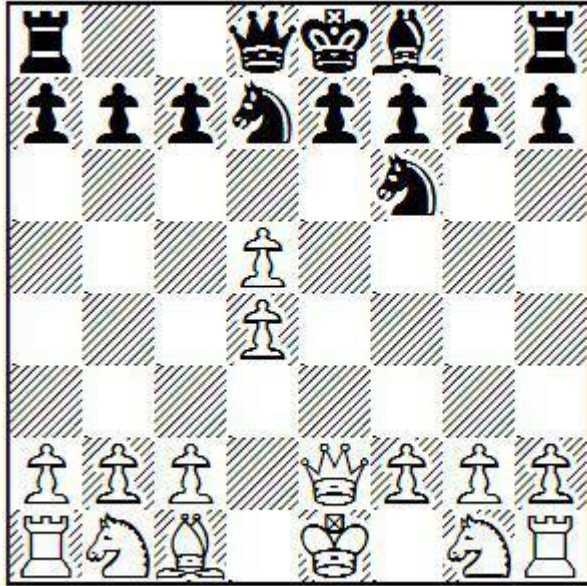
5 ... Bxe2

And now:

A: 6 Qxe2

B: 6 Nxe2

A: 6 Qxe2

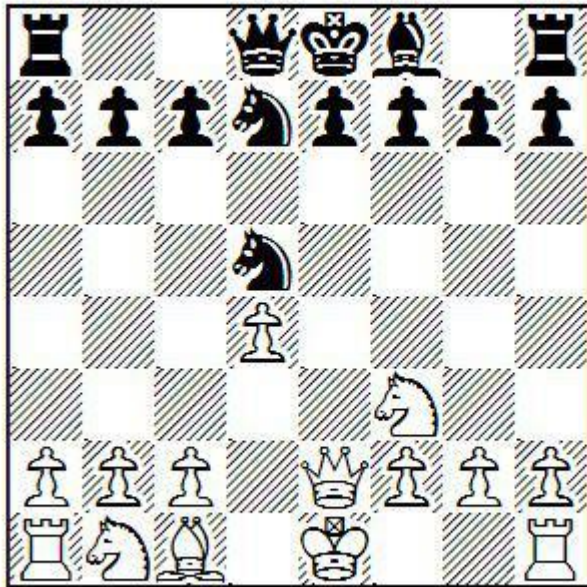


6 ... Nxd5

6 ... Nb6? 7 c4 c6 8 dxc6 Qxd4 9 cxb7 Rb8 might give Black some compensation, were it not for the simple 10 Nd2!.

7 Nf3

7 c4 N5f6 will transpose.



At this point, Black has usually opted for classical development with 7 ... e6, followed by ... Be7, ... 0-0, ... Re8, ... c7-c6, and patient shuffling with manoeuvres such as ... Nd7-f8-g6 and ... b7-b6/ ... Qc8-b7. The position is slightly better for White, who has more space and easier development, but Black has no obvious weaknesses to speak of and is well prepared to meet any confrontations in the centre.

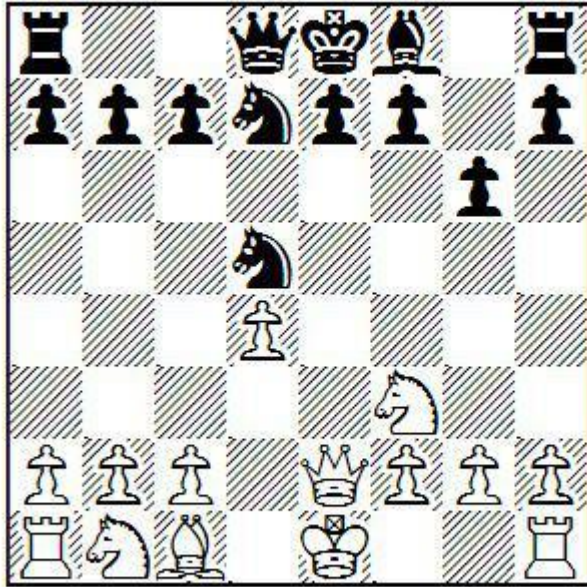
However, Black has an interesting alternative in a kingside fianchetto – one of the only times you'll see it in our repertoire – usually combined with a quick ... c7-c5. This set-up is more positionally suspect because the e7-pawn will often feel quite naked, so Black will have to compensate for this with piece activity, likely offering up the little soldier. If White accepts the gift, the pawn sacrifice gives Black a dangerous level of activity that extends into the endgame.

Overall, 7 ... e6 is probably the better move, but 7 ... g6 is a bit more fun to play. It's – how do I put this? – not as bad as it looks.

A1: 7 ... g6!?

A2: 7 ... e6

A1: 7 ... g6!?



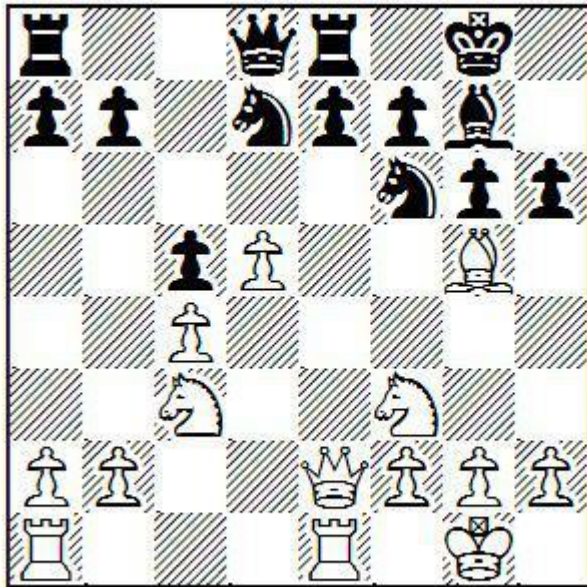
A respectable alternative to the main line, despite the computer's initial scepticism.

8 c4 N5f6 9 0-0 Bg7 10 Re1 0-0!

This pawn sacrifice is the only way to make the set-up playable. In fact, White is probably best advised to ignore it, although I suspect most players would happily snatch e7 after some cursory calculations.

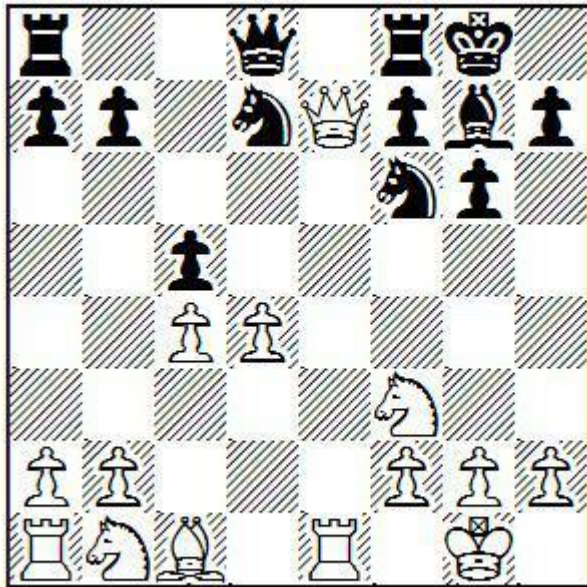
11 Qxe7

11 Nc3 is safer, when 11 ... Re8 12 Bg5 c5 13 d5 h6



14 Be3 (instead, 14 Bh4 Qb6 15 Rad1 e6 and 14 Bf4 e5! 15 dxe6 Rxe6 are about level) 14 ... e6 15 d6 is critical, if committal. Now 15 ... Qb6 16 Qd2 Rac8 17 Rad1 Rc6 is natural, as Black seeks to round up the cheeky d-pawn. However, White can retain an edge with 18 b3! (less threatening is 18 Bxh6 Bxh6 19 Qxh6 Qxb2! with chances for both sides) 18 ... Bf8 19 Bxh6 Rxd6 20 Qc1! and after this sequence of accurate moves, White maintains a slight advantage thanks to Black's weakened kingside and cramped minor pieces. Black should seek exchanges in the centre to try and relieve the constriction, starting with 20 ... Rxd1 21 Rxd1 Rd8.

11 ... c5!



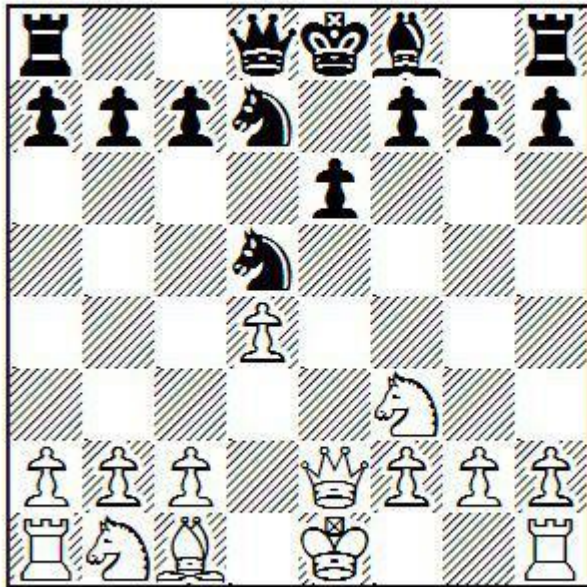
Immediately trying to give the g7-bishop the freedom for which it longs. Suddenly, it's White, not Black, whose development is looking a little retarded. I suspect there is sufficient compensation even with best play, but certainly I would rather have the black pieces over the board. Since there is no theory on this position, as well as only a small chance you'll ever get here, we'll just look at a few sample lines:

a) 12 d5 Qa5 13 Qe2 Rfe8 14 Be3 Ng4 with excellent compensation.

b) 12 dxc5 Qxe7 13 Rxe7 Rfe8 14 Rxe8+ Nxe8! 15 Nc3 Nxc5 16 Be3 (or 16 Bd2 Nd6 with an excellent position for Black) 16 ... Bxc3 17 bxc3 Rc8 and White is slightly better in the ending, although a draw is the most likely result.

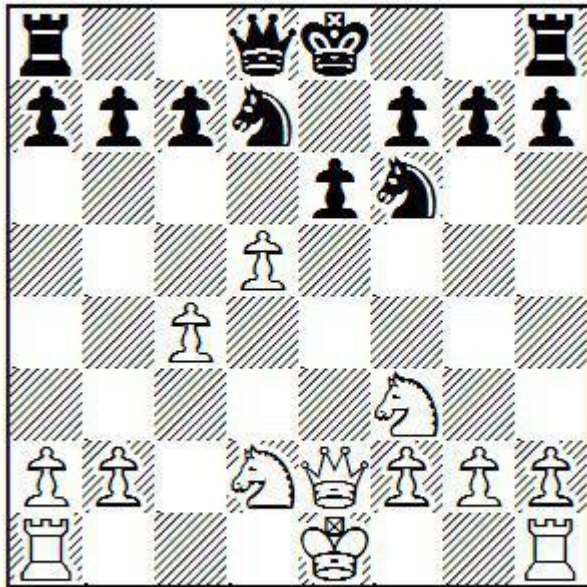
c) 12 Qxd8 Rfxd8 13 Be3 (13 d5 b5 14 Nc3 bxc4 is at least equal) 13 ... Ng4 and Black has good compensation worthy of White's extra pawn, G.Cools-Y.Boidman, Belgian Team Championship 2002.

A2: 7 ... e6



8 0-0

8 c4 is the wrong move-order, as it gives Black the opportunity to interpose 8 ... Bb4+!. In these cramped structures, exchanges will usually work in Black's favour. For example, 9 Bd2 (9 Nfd2?! isn't very logical, as well as allowing Black the excellent active possibility of 9 ... Nf4! 10 Qf3 e5! 11 0-0 0-0 12 dxe5 Ng6 13 Qxb7 Rb8 14 Qd5 Ndx5 with a slight advantage despite the pawn deficit; while 9 Nbd2 N5f6 is a favourable version of the main line: after 10 0-0 0-0 11 Ne4 Nxe4 12 Qxe4 c6!, the exchanges have significantly helped Black's defence, and the position is very close to equal) 9 ... Bxd2+ 10 Nbx2 N5f6 11 d5 (the only way to make sense of White's play)

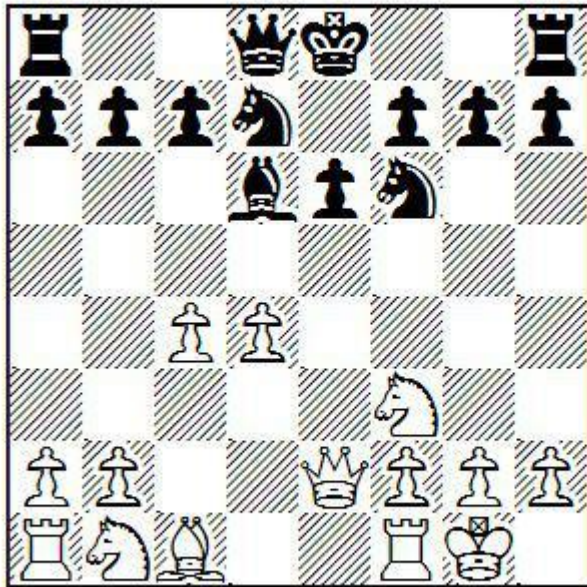


11 ... 0-0! (11 ... Qe7 12 dxe6 Qxe6 13 Qxe6+ fxe6 14 0-0-0 0-0-0 15 Rhe1 gives White a small endgame advantage) 12 dxe6 Re8 13 Ng5! fxe6 14 0-0 Nc5! (even if 14 ... h6 15 Ngf3?! e5! 16 Rad1 e4! favoured Black in *Dexteraberdeen* (2183)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013) 15 Nge4 (or 15 Qe3 e5 16 Ndf3 Qe7 17 b4 e4!) 15 ... Nfxe4 16 Nxe4 Qd3 with equality, J.Masco-R.Damaso, Dos Hermanas, Internet (blitz) 2004.

8 ... Bd6

This is the right square for the bishop, although 8 ... Be7 is also very solid.

9 c4 N5f6



White has achieved her goal of a pleasant space advantage and easy development, while avoiding the fireworks more typical of our repertoire. However, Black's position is solid and, for once, we're not even a pawn down! Moreover, Black still has the potential to uncork some powerful activity if White goes pawn hunting, for example after the natural 10 d5.

Here are a few sample variations; there's no need to memorize them, but it's useful to play over what follows to get a feel for the ideas hidden in the position.

10 Nc3

Instead:

a) 10 d5 must be met by the standard sacrifice 10 ... 0-0!, when 11 dxe6 Qe7! 12 Re1 Qxe6 13 Qxe6 fxe6 14 Rxe6 Nc5! 15 Re2 Rae8! gives Black excellent compensation in the endgame.

b) 10 c5! is probably best, although it entails some risk to give up the d5-square. Then 10 ... Be7 11 Nc3 0-0 12 Bf4 Nh5 13 Bd2 c6 is very slightly better for White. The middlegame revolves around White trying to maintain her extra space and control over the dark squares. For her part, if she manages to avoid this, Black can get on top due to White's weak d-pawn.

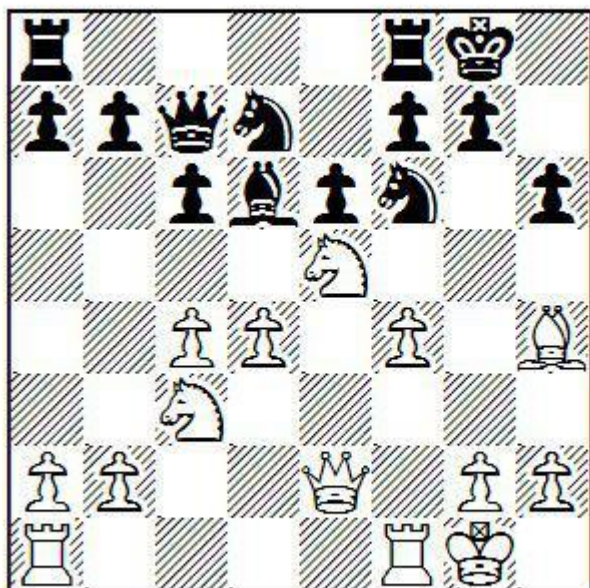
10 ... 0-0 11 Bg5

11 Rd1 c6 12 Ne5 Qc7 13 Bf4 Rfd8 14 Rd3 Ne8 15 Rh3 is Game 10 (Hommeles-Rausis), and now 15 ... Bxe5 16 dxe5 Nf8! sees White's attack come to nothing; e.g. 17 Ne4?! Ng6 18 Bg3 Rd4 with advantage to Black.

11 ... h6 12 Bh4 c6 13 Ne5!

Not 13 d5? exd5 14 cxd5 Re8! with advantage; while 13 Rad1 Qa5 14 Rfe1 Qh5!, equalizing, is a useful manoeuvre to remember.

13 ... Qc7 14 f4!



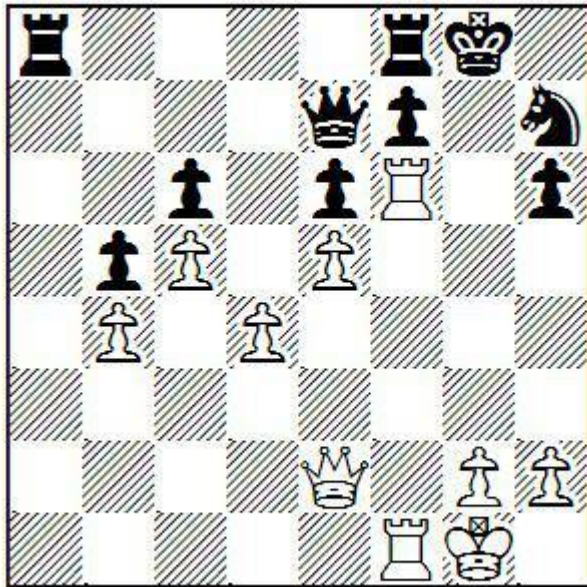
14 ... a6!

Threatening ... c6-c5, but also provoking White's own c-pawn forward.

15 c5 Be7 16 Rf3 b6 17 b4 b5!

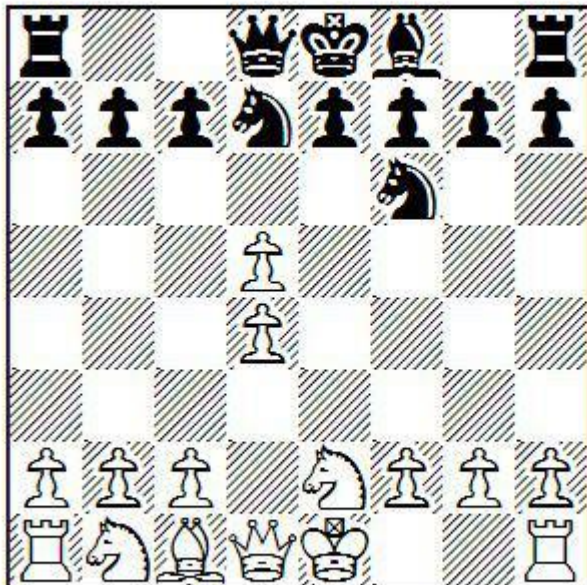
Somewhat counter-intuitive; Black seeks to grab the a-file before initiating exchanges on the kingside with ... Nxe5 and ... Nh7.

18 Raf1 a5! 19 a3 axb4 20 axb4 Nxe5! 21 fxe5 Nh7 22 Bxe7 Qxe7 23 Ne4 Ng5! 24 Nf6+!? gxf6 25 Rxf6 Nh7!



With equality, as in another simulated game *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014. Incidentally, I can confirm that this line follows all my computer's first-choice moves for both sides from 9 c4 onwards.

B: 6 Nxe2



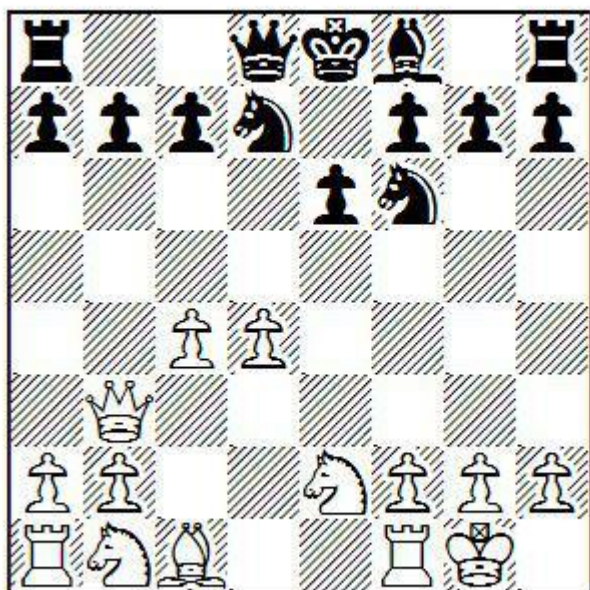
A sensible alternative, though in general Black should not be too concerned by variations in which White recaptures on e2 this way.

6 ... Nxd5 7 0-0 e6

7 ... g6!? is also possible; then 8 c4 N5f6 9 Nbc3 Bg7 10 Bf4 c6 is slightly better for White, although direct action via 11 d5?! 0-0! 12 dxc6 bxc6 13 Qa4 e5 14 Bg5 Qc7 was already more comfortable for Black in T.Barabas-Ja.Petro, Hungarian Team Championship 2009.

8 c4 N5f6 9 Qb3

If 9 Nbc3 c6 10 d5, as in D.Campora-R.Damaso, Portugal 2000, then 10 ... Nb6! 11 dxe6 Qxd1 12 Rxd1 Nxc4 with equality.



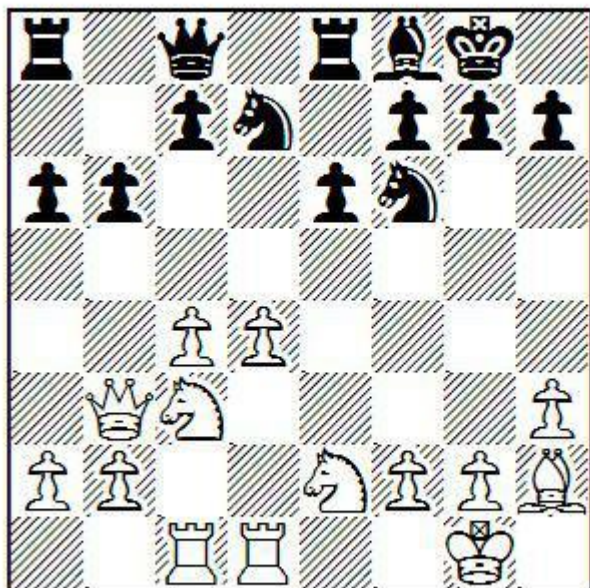
9 ... c5!

A sharp novelty, but well suited to players who don't have the patience for prolonged passivity. Normally Black should prefer to focus on castling, but in this particular position, she can take advantage of White's errant queen to immediately challenge the centre.

Previously Black had played 9 ... Qc8?!, which is not the best move objectively. However, the rest of the game is very instructive, so I would advise you to play through it. Every now and then in our repertoire, unfortunately, Black will find herself having regained the pawn but doomed to this sort of cramped structure in the face of

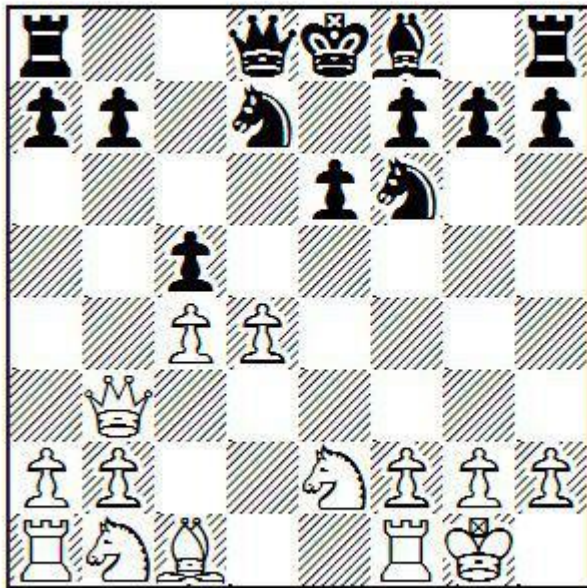
White's c4/d4 pawn centre. The key in such situations is not to get discouraged and try to lash out; Black's position may be passive, but it's solid, and there's little risk of actual suffocation. With careful manoeuvring, Black can slowly improve her set-up and wait for the correct moment to strike. While this approach is more similar to a Sicilian Hedgehog than our swashbuckling Scandinavian, *c'est la vie*. My advice is to get over your disappointment quickly, take a few deep breaths and knuckle down, safe in the knowledge that your position is fundamentally sound.

The following game is a good example of exactly this approach: 10 Nbc3 Be7 11 Bf4 0-0 (completing development in these lines is priority number one: Black can quickly find herself in trouble by engaging in the centre before her king is safely tucked away; for example, 11 ... c5?! 12 d5! exd5 13 cxd5 0-0 14 Ng3 is much more pleasant for White, who will soon consider pushing d5-d6) 12 Rac1 a6! (again, Black is happy just to control some squares and maintain the foundations of her position; White has no obvious breakthrough and, without the light-squared bishop, will find it difficult to put pressure on Black's pawn structure) 13 h3 Re8 14 Bh2 Bf8 15 Rfd1 b6!



(a standard means of developing the queen in these positions, taking advantage of the weakened light squares; Black has almost equalized) 16 Qc2 Qb7 17 d5 e5 18 Ng3 g6 19 a3 Bh6 20 Rb1 b5! (finally, a break!) 21 b3 Bf8 22 a4 bxc4 23 bxc4 Qc8 24 Kh1 Nc5 25 f3 Nfd7 26 Nge4 f5 27 Nxc5 Nxc5 (suddenly, one can no longer talk about a white space advantage) 28 Bg1 Bd6 29 a5 Qd7 30 Re1 Re7 31 Re2 Rae8 32 Rbe1 h5 33 Bf2 Kh7 34 Bh4 Rf7 35 Bf2 Rfe7 36 Qb2?? (a horrible blunder; otherwise the game was equal) 36 ... Nd3 37 Qc2 Nxe1 38 Rxe1 Bb4 39 Rd1 Bxc3 40 Qxc3 e4 41 Bh4 exf3 42 Bxe7 fxe3 43 Kxg2 Qxe7 44 Rd2 Qg5+ 45 Kf1 Re3 46 Qd4 Qg3 47 Rf2 Qxh3+ 48 Rg2 Qh1+ 0-1 H.Ayyad-Fa.Eid, Dubai 2011.

Returning to 9 ... c5!:



10 d5

10 Qxb7 is risky, but critical. With some precision, White can emerge with a slightly more comfortable endgame: 10 ... cxd4 11 Nxd4 Rb8 12 Qf3 (not 12 Qxa7?? Bc5, winning the knight) 12 ... Ne5 13 Qd1 Nxc4 14 Nc6! (14 Qa4+ Qd7 15 Qxc4 Rb4 restores material equality) 14 ... Qxd1 15 Rxd1 Ra8 16 b3 Nd6 17 Bb2 Nd5 with a small advantage to White.

10 ... exd5 11 Re1 Be7 12 cxd5 0-0 13 Qxb7 Qb6!

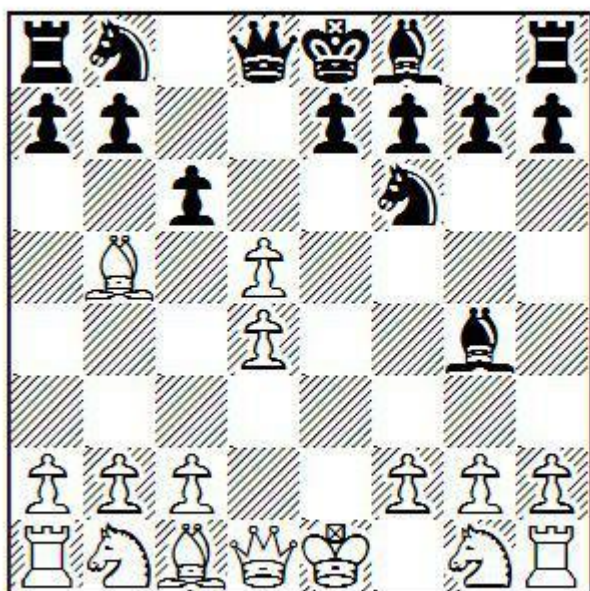
Here Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn, which will soon fall while White is finishing her development.

Chapter Seven

The Elbow

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ c6!?



In an episode from the third season of the fantastic television series *The West Wing*, Leo McGarry, the Chief of Staff to the President of the United States, talks about the concept of “throwing an elbow”. He tells a story about legendary basketball centre Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics. Russell was struggling against his opposite numbers because he chose to play by the rules rather than ‘play dirty’. As Leo tells it: “Russell was getting eaten alive because they could never get him to throw an elbow. He didn’t want to do it. So, Coach Red Auerbach told him to do it one time. ‘Throw an elbow in a nationally televised game. You’ll never have to do it again.’”

As much as I could go on and on about *The West Wing*, there is a point. As I mentioned earlier, 4 Bb5+ Nbd7 5 Be2 is an incredibly

rare variation, but that doesn't mean it won't grow in popularity in the future – particularly because it could be seen as a nice, safe, 'easy' way to get a small plus. And indeed, as we saw, White never faces too many dangers and certainly doesn't have to learn much theory to stay out of trouble in the main lines.

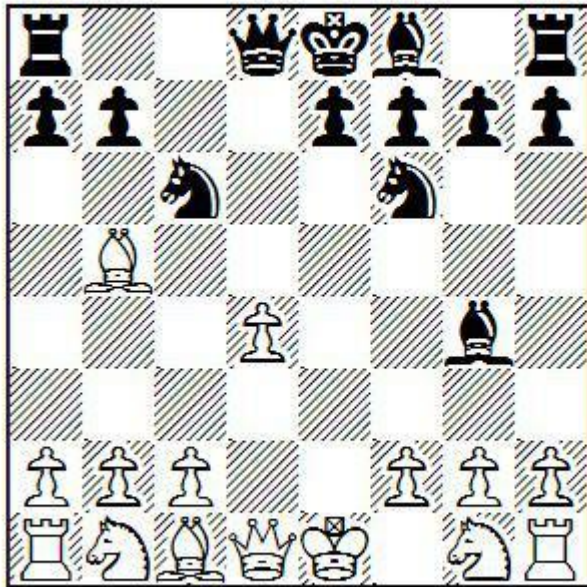
Recently, the inventive Australian IM Guy West, one of the country's first regular Scandinavian players, complained to me that a few guys in his local club had started playing this variation against him regularly, much to his annoyance. But he didn't want to resort to 4 ... c6 because he thought it was fundamentally unsound – which is possibly true.

I wrote back and told him to "throw an elbow". As we saw, Black has good chances of equalizing against 4 ... Nbd7 5 Be2, but it's a tough line to drum up winning chances. However, 4 ... c6!? leads to far more complicated positions where Black's pieces quickly reach active posts, and against which White must play accurately not only to keep an advantage, but even to stay out of trouble. There's theory to learn, and the positions aren't going to suit players looking for a calmer game. And even if White manages to navigate the murky opening swamp, the resulting endgames seem to give Black just enough compensation to take half a point – at least, my engines consistently make draws in the many simulations I've run.

The point is that an opponent is far less likely to play 4 Bb5+ if she knows she has to learn the theory on yet another crazy sacrifice after 4 ... c6!? – that is, if you've developed a reputation by "throwing an elbow" in this line before. Not only is it a great surprise weapon – Black scores 60% with it in over-the-board play, and even higher in blitz – it is likely going to be off-putting for future opponents.

So even if you don't believe in the soundness of what follows, I suggest you add it to the memory bank, and throw it out there once in a while. It might pay dividends not only as a surprise weapon, but also as a useful deterrent!

5 dxc6 Nxc6



At first, it is hard to believe Black can drum up sufficient attacking chances against the white position. But Black's compensation manifests itself a little more subtly in this variation. She usually obtains the bishop pair after White plays Bxc6 (and sometimes even Bg5xf6), and can seek to exploit this by eventually opening up the game through ... e7/e6-e5 or ... c6-c5 breaks.

Meanwhile, White often finds it difficult to coordinate her pieces due to pressure on the d4-, c2- and b2-pawns. The pin on the f3-knight can also be very annoying, and attempts to break it with h2-h3 and g2-g4 often lead to disaster after Black sacrifices with ... Nxg4. While there are no obvious attacking motifs, Black often enjoys full or almost-full compensation, active pieces, and easy play.



*IM Guy West – one of Australia’s most creative gambiteers,
and a key contributor to the theory of this opening.*

Game 11

T.M.Leão-D.Smerdon
Famalicão 2014

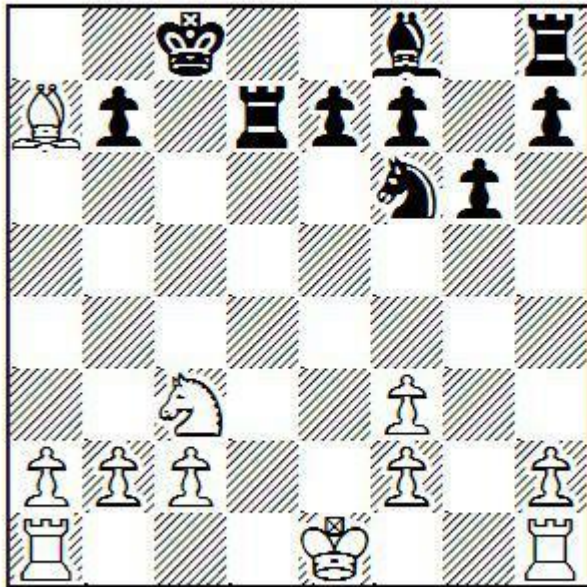
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ c6!?

This sacrifice, in the style of Marshall’s original Scandinavian, is very unusual, but the more I studied it, the more it came to grow on me. Ultimately it must be unsound, but it certainly is more difficult for White to handle than it first appears.

5 dxc6 Nxc6 6 Ne2

A sensible option, if not the most ambitious.

6 Nf3! is the most testing. A typical continuation runs 6 ... Qb6! 7 Nc3 0-0-0 8 Bxc6 Qxc6 9 Bf4 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Qxf3 11 gxf3 Rxd4 12 Be3 Rd7 13 Bxa7 g6 with the characteristic endgame of the Elbow.



White has an extra pawn but a crippled structure, while Black has better activity and easy play. Objectively, these sorts of endings should be drawn with best play, so if you back yourself to understand them better than your opponent (who, remember, has most likely never seen this position before in her life), it's not a bad practical choice. For further explanation, see the theory section.

6 ... e6

Slightly inaccurate.

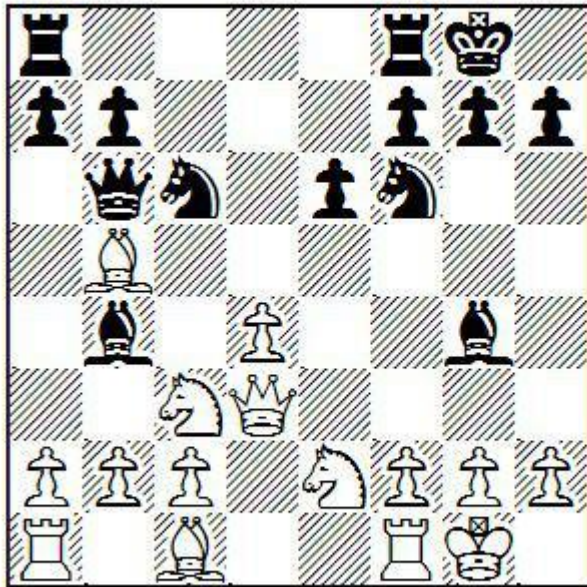
a) 6 ... Bxe2 7 Qxe2 Qxd4 8 0-0 e6 9 Nc3 Be7 10 Rd1 Qb6 11 Be3 Qc7 is about equal.

b) 6 ... Qd5! 7 Bxc6+ Qxc6 8 0-0 e6 gives Black good compensation for the pawn, and is a more accurate way to steer towards an unbalanced game than the text.

7 0-0 Qb6 8 Nbc3!

An extra option afforded to White due to Black's inaccuracy on move six.

8 ... Bb4 9 Qd3 0-0



Despite my sixth-move inexactitude, Black still retains good compensation for the pawn. The bishops make for an imposing duo with their targets set on the white knights, while the black rooks are raring to enter the fray on the semi-open d- and c-files.

10 Na4

Or 10 Be3 Bf5 11 Qd1 (not 11 Qd2? Qxb5!) 11 ... Bxc3 12 Nxc3 Rfd8 with good compensation for Black.

10 ... Qa5 11 c3

11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 b3 was better, but Black then has the pair of bishops to add to the trumps, and retains good pressure after 12 ... Bf5 13 Qd1 Rfd8.

11 ... Bd6!?

Ambitious; I preferred to keep the pressure on rather than regain my pawn.

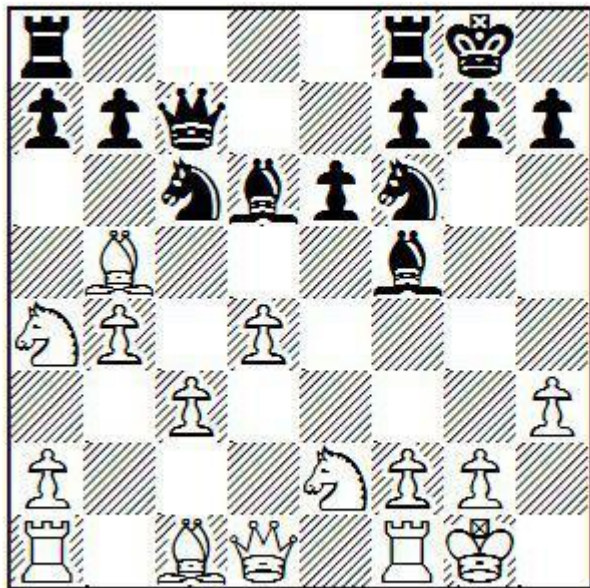
11 ... Bxe2 12 Qxe2 Nxd4! was possible, although after 13 cxd4 a6! 14 Bxa6! Rxa6 15 b3 Rc6 16 Bb2! Rfc8 17 Rac1, the simplifications help steer the game towards the drawing margin.

12 b4 Qc7 13 h3

13 Ng3 gives Black a choice between simplifying the position with 13 ... Nxb4 14 cxb4 a6, or maintaining the tension after 13 ... a6 14

Bxc6 Qxc6 15 Nc5 Bxg3! 16 Qxg3 Bf5 with compensation for the pawn.

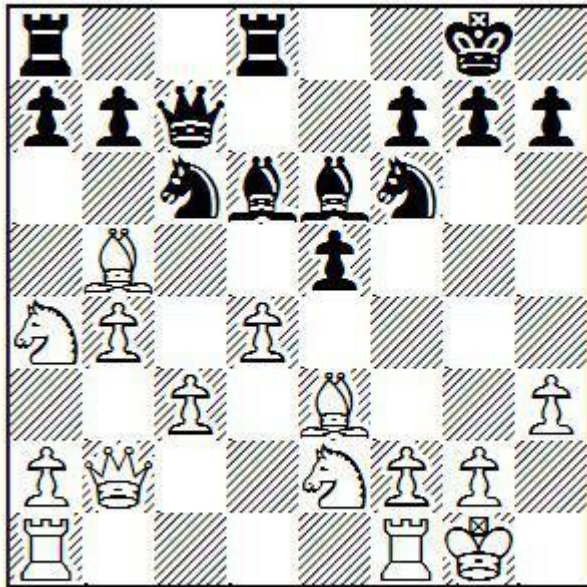
13 ... Bf5 14 Qd1



14 ... e5!?

Tempting, though Black had several useful waiting moves before engaging in the centre, such as ... h7-h6, ... a7-a6, ... Ne7, or bringing the rooks into the game.

15 Be3 Rfd8 16 Qb3 Be6! 17 Qb2

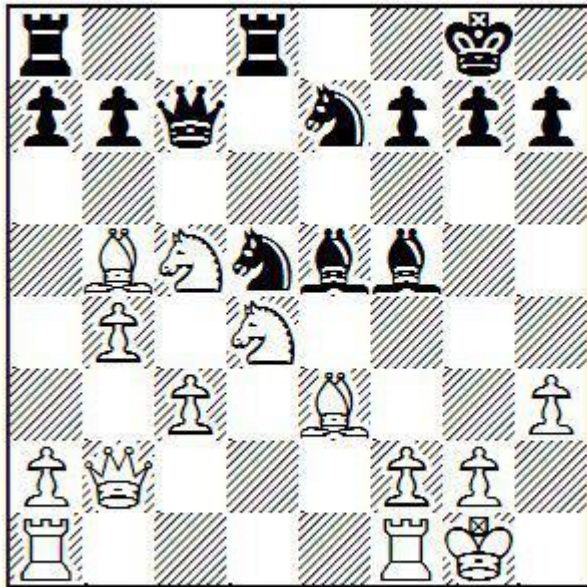


17 ... Ne7?!

17 ... Qc8! was an excellent opportunity, eyeing up a sacrifice on h3. Now that the majority of White's forces are committed to the queenside, the kingside is vulnerable to a flash attack; for example, 18 Nc5? (18 Bg5! exd4 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 cxd4 Bxh3! 21 Rac1! with complicated play) 18 ... Bxh3! 19 gxh3 Qxh3 20 f3 Nd5! 21 Bg5 e4! with advantage to Black.

18 Nc5! Bf5 19 dxe5 Bxe5 20 Nd4 Nfd5!

White has managed to hold on to the extra pawn but is less prepared to handle the minor piece traffic jam in the centre.



21 Bd2 b6?!

21 ... Rac8! would have completed the mobilization of Black's forces, promising full compensation.

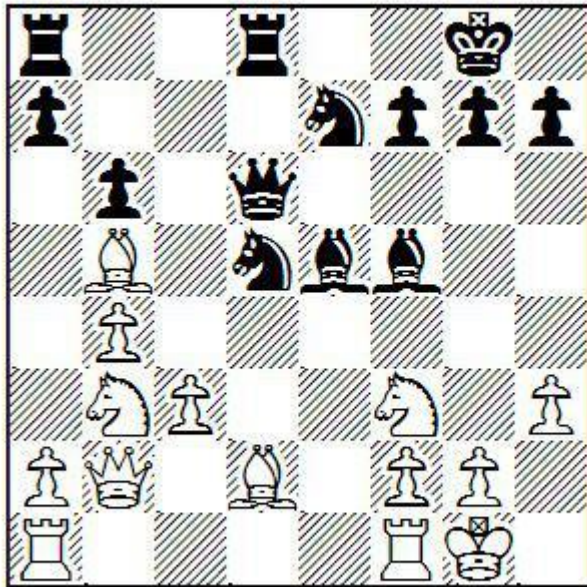
22 Ncb3 Qd6?!

Here 22 ... a6! 23 Be2 Be4 would still have given Black good chances.

23 Nf3?

Black catches a lucky break, but it is hard to expect White to successfully navigate all of the dangerous waters of these gambits at club levels.

White should have maintained the outpost on d4, blunting Black's activity. After 23 Rfe1! Bg6 24 Rad1, it is unlikely that Black's compensation would have been fully worth the sacrificed pawn.



23 ... Nxb4!

Based on a sharp tactical sequence in which Black had calculated one move further.

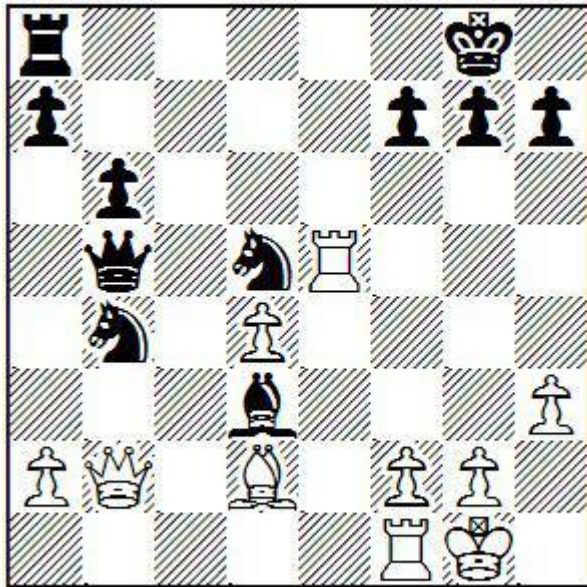
24 Nxe5 Qxe5 25 Rae1?!

Objectively, 25 Nd4! Nd3 26 Qa3! offered the best defensive chances.

25 ... Qxb5 26 Nd4?

Both 26 Rxe7?! Nc6 and 26 cxb4 Qd7 favour Black (but not the tempting 26 ... Bd3? 27 Rxe7 Bxf1 28 Re5! and White has a dangerous attack; e.g. 28 ... Qa6? 29 Rg5 g6 30 Nd4!).

26 ... Rxd4! 27 cxd4 Ned5 28 Re5 Bd3!



The move White missed. Black is just in time to take care of all of the extra material.

29 Rfe1

29 Qxb4 Qxb4 (or 29 ... Nxb4) 30 Bxb4 Nxb4 is winning, because 31 Rc1 Nxa2 32 Rc7 a5 33 d5 Nb4 34 d6 Kf8 35 d7 Ba6! covers everything.

29 ... f6! 30 Re6 Nc2 31 Qxb5 Bxb5 32 Rd1 Rd8 33 Be3 Kf7 34 Re4 Nc3 0-1

Completing an admirable performance by the equine duo. A good Elbow outing!

Game 12

M.Vachier Lagrave-D.Smerdon

Internet (blitz) 2014

This was only a blitz game, but it is encouraging to note that the Elbow can cause problems even against the world's very best.

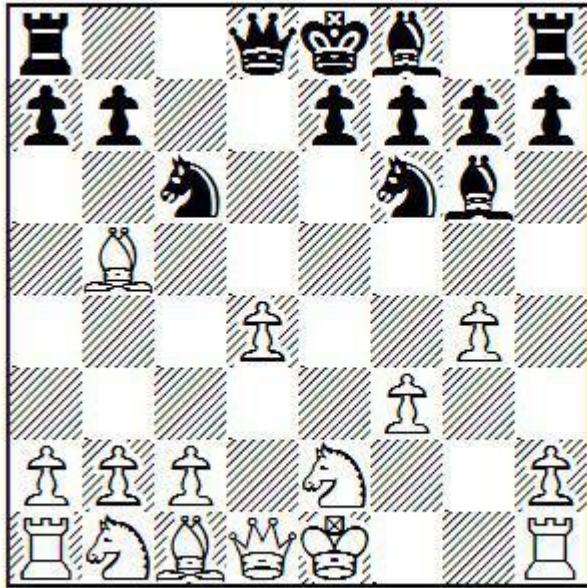
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+

The actual move-order of the game was 4 f3 Bf5 5 g4 Bg6 6 Bb5+ c6! 7 dxc6 Nxc6, a line which has been played against me by several strong players, including Danish GM Allan Rasmussen.

4 ... c6!?

Elbow time!

5 dxc6 Nxc6 6 f3 Bf5 7 g4!? Bg6 8 Ne2



8 ... e6

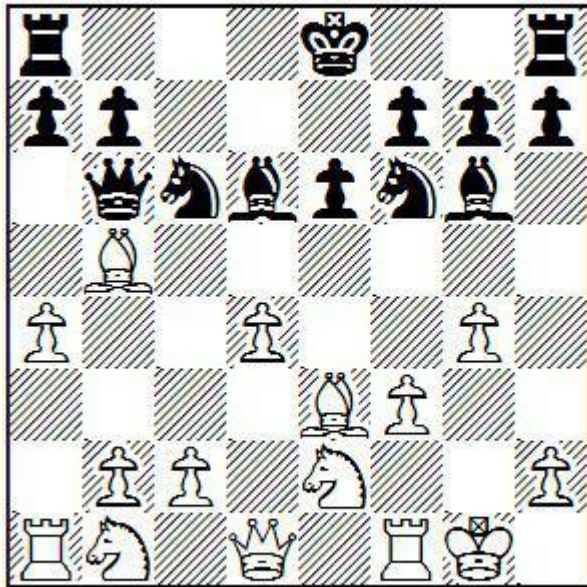
8 ... Qb6!? is my preferred continuation here. The following sharp sequence is quite favourable for Black: 9 Nbc3 e5! 10 dxe5 Rd8 11 Bd2 Nd5 12 Bg5 (or 12 Nxd5?! Rxd5 13 c4 Rd3! with an advantage) 12 ... Nxc3 13 Qxd8+ Qxd8 14 Bxc6+ bxc6 15 Bxd8 Nxe2 16 Kxe2 Kxd8 and Black has excellent winning chances.

9 0-0 Qb6

9 ... Bd6 was sensible. White's kingside is critically weak, so Black can just develop naturally and enjoy the organic compensation that flows from both a better structure and development.

10 a4 Bd6 11 Be3?!

After 11 c4, I had intended 11 ... 0-0-0!?, with the idea that 12 Be3? can be met tactically by 12 ... Nxd4!! 13 Nxd4 Bc5 14 a5 Qd6 with an advantage for Black.



11 ... 0-0

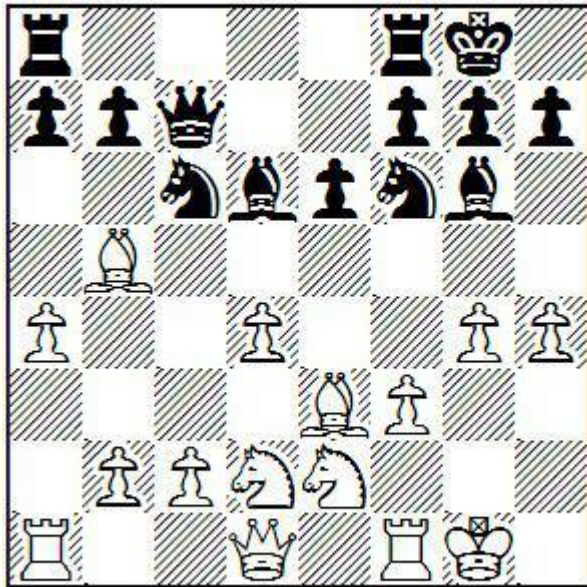
11 ... h5! was stronger. The point is that 12 g5 Nd5 13 Bf2 a6 14 Bxc6+ Qxc6 15 Nbc3 Nb4! hits the pawns on c2 and f3 simultaneously, leaving Black clearly on top.

12 Nd2

12 c4 Qc7 also gives Black excellent compensation.

12 ... Qc7! 13 h4?

White should probably have preferred to return the pawn with 13 Bxc6 Bxh2+ 14 Kg2 bxc6 15 Nc4, though with two bishops, a superior structure and a safer king, only Black can be better here.



13 ... h5?

Unfortunately, this is now the wrong move. 13 ... Nb4! wins material immediately.

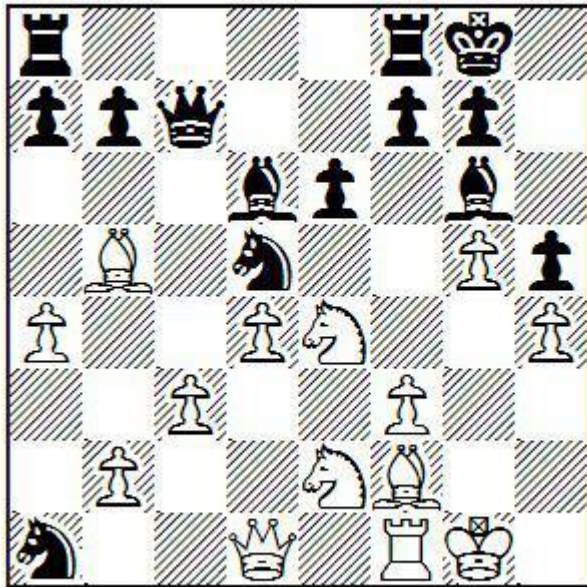
14 g5 Nd5 15 Bf2 Ncb4

15 ... Nce7 16 Ne4 Nf5 would have left Black with a comfortable advantage. White has succeeded in shoring up the kingside, but Black's pieces remain excellently placed.

16 c3

Here 16 Ne4! was best, when Black has sufficient compensation but not more.

16 ... Nc2! 17 Ne4 Nxa1



Black's opening has been successful, and converting the extra material should be only a matter of technique and time. Unfortunately, both of these things are often lacking in blitz ...

18 Qxa1 a6 19 Bd3 Nf4 20 Nxf4 Bxf4 21 Qe1 Rfd8

21 ... e5! was the cleanest way to open the position, because 22 d5?? loses to 22 ... Qd7!.

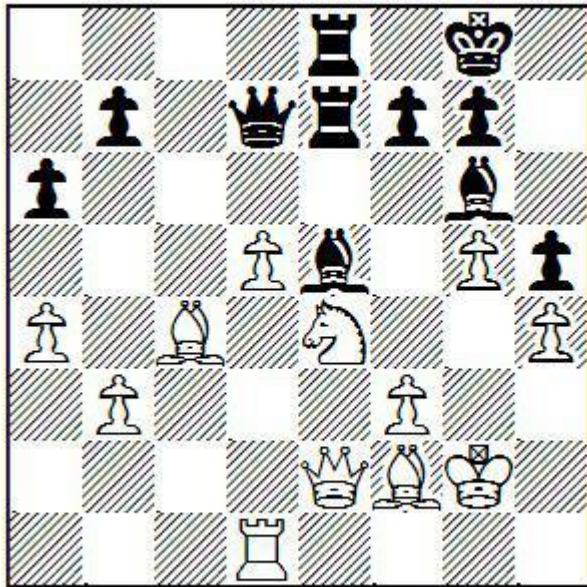
22 Qe2 e5! 23 Rd1 exd4 24 cxd4 Re8

A familiar trick would have picked up a pawn here: 24 ... Qd7! 25 Kg2 Qxa4.

25 Bc4 Rac8

Again, 25 ... Qd7!.

26 b3 Re7 27 d5 Qd7 28 Kg2 Rce8 29 Rd4 Be5 30 Rd1



30 ... Bd6

Around here I began to lose my way. 30 ... Bb8! is easily winning for Black.

31 Bd3 Bb8 32 Bb1 Re5?

A pointless move, time-induced. 32 ... Bxe4! 33 fxe4 Qd6 34 Qf3 f5! would have encouraged resignation.

33 d6

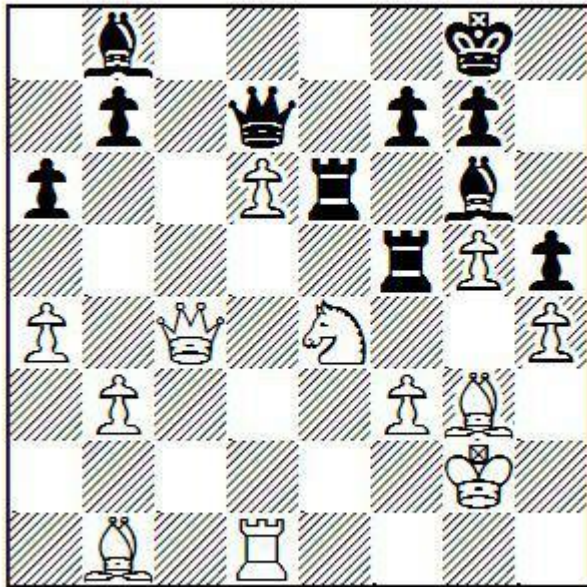
33 Bg3 Rxe4 34 Bxe4 Bxg3 35 Kxg3 Qd6+ 36 Kg2 Bxe4 37 Rd4! is equal.

33 ... R8e6 34 Bg3 Rf5?

It was not too late to bail out with 34 ... Rxd6 35 Rxd6 Qxd6!, when Black can even still claim an edge.

35 Qc4?

The quality of the game continues to fall with the clocks. After 35 Qf2!, White is just better.



35 ... b5?

35 ... Rxf3!! 36 Kxf3 Rxe4 37 Bxe4 Qg4+ 38 Ke3 Qxg3+ 39 Ke2 Qh2+ 40 Kd3 Qg3+ is a draw by perpetual check.

36 axb5 axb5 37 Qc3 Ba7??

Losing, though Black's position was collapsing in any case. For instance, after 37 ... b4 38 Qxb4 Rb5, gaining some much-needed air for the rook, White is still clearly better thanks to the powerful pawn on d6.

38 Qc7!

Maxime doesn't miss the chance to take his winning shot.

38 ... Re7 39 dxe7 Qxd1 40 Qd8+! 1-0

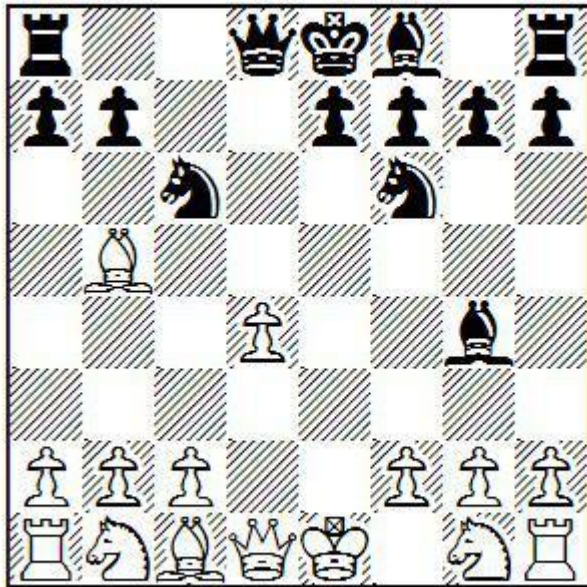
Capping off an impressive fightback. I was most annoyed to have wasted such a good opportunity to claim a big scalp, but the opening can't be blamed for that!

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ c6!? 5 dxc6

5 Be2? makes no sense at all: 5 ... Bxe2 6 Qxe2 cxd5 and only Black can be better.

5 ... Nxc6

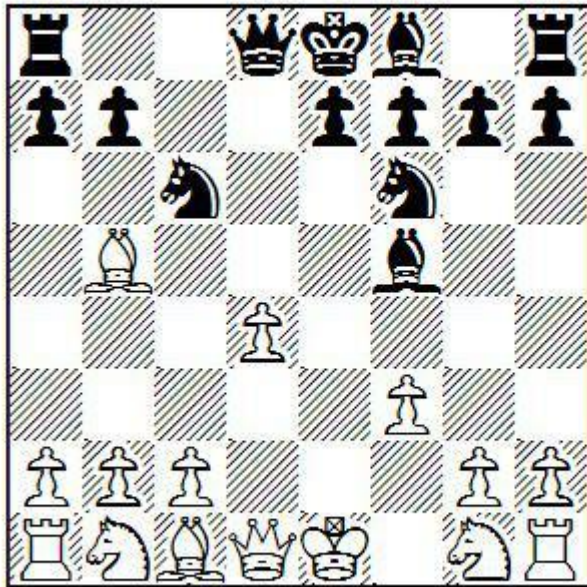


In this position, White has four choices. Although the first of these, 6 f3?!, is dubious, it is theoretically important due to the major transposition 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ and now 5 ... c6!? 6 dxc6 Nxc6.

- A: 6 f3?!**
- B: 6 Bxc6+**
- C: 6 Ne2**
- D: 6 Nf3!**

As an aside, I have a feeling one of the reasons that 4 Bb5+ is so rare is that players facing the position for the first time might not realize immediately that White wins after 5 ... Bxd1?? 6 c7+! Nc6 7 cxd8Q+ Rxd8 8 Kxd1.

A: 6 f3?! Bf5



This position, more commonly reached by 4 f3 Bf5 5 Bb5+ c6 etc, offers Black excellent compensation. Now:

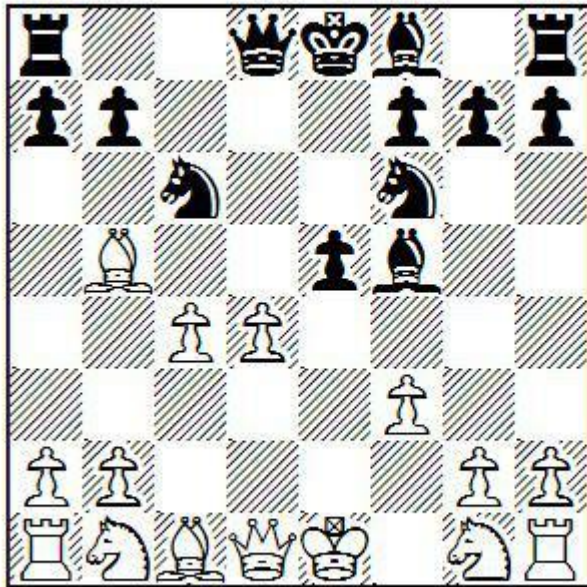
A1: 7 c4

A2: 7 Nc3

A3: 7 Ne2

Alternatively, the rare 7 g4?! Bg6 8 Ne2 transposes to Game 12 (Vachier Lagrave-Smerdon).

A1: 7 c4 e5!



A strong central counter.

8 d5

8 dxe5? Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 0-0-0+ is practically winning for Black; while after 8 Ne2 Qc7!, Black will castle queenside, with a powerful position.

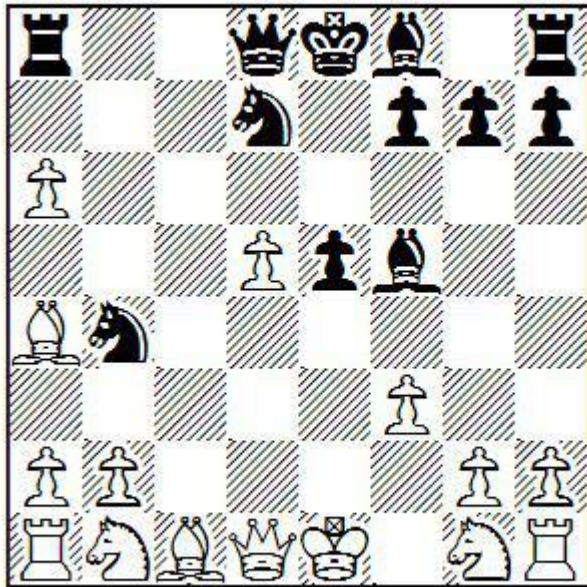
8 ... a6! 9 Ba4 b5!

A standard motif.

10 cxb5

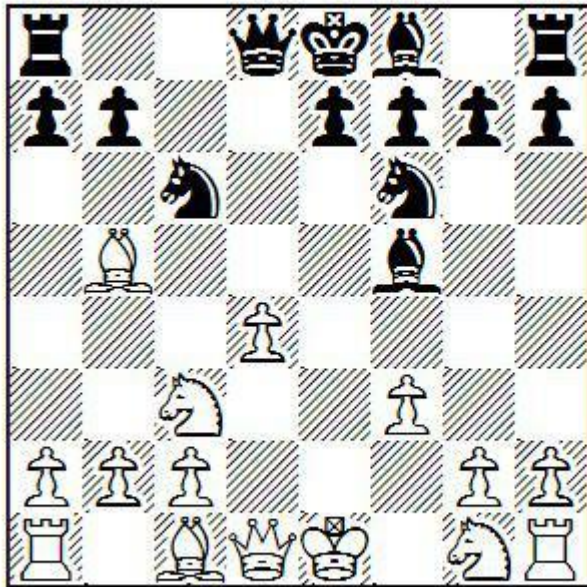
10 dxc6 bxa4 11 Qxa4 Qb6 also gives Black a very strong initiative.

10 ... Nb4 11 bxa6+ Nd7!



Despite the three pawn deficit, Black's compensation is more than sufficient; in fact, White is in huge trouble. Black will quickly swing her bishop to c5 and simply castle, after which White's exposed king will be helplessly trapped in the crossfire. White is at a loss to prevent this, because 12 Be3? is met by 12 ... Qa5! 13 Bxd7+ Kxd7! 14 Bd2 Nd3+ 15 Kf1 Qxa6 and Black wins.

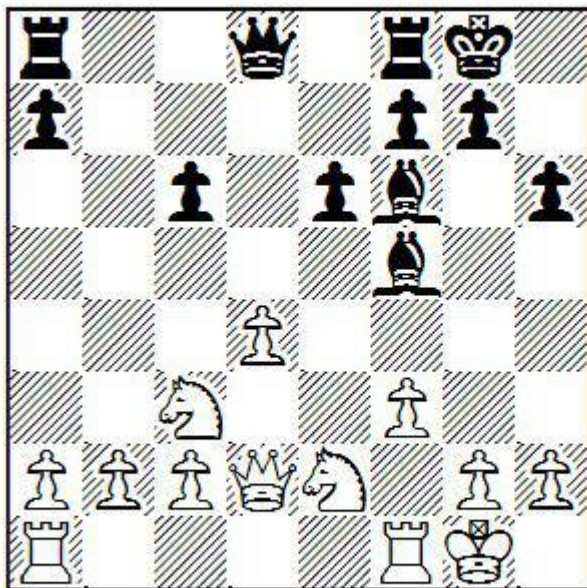
A2: 7 Nc3



7 ... e6 8 Nge2 Bd6

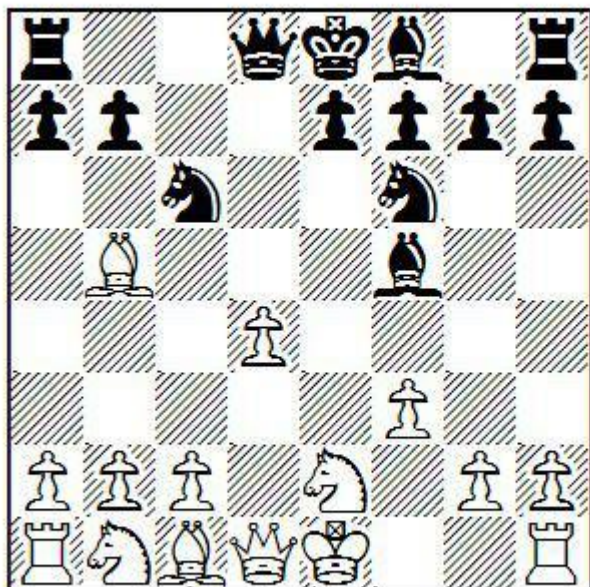
Again, Black has good long-term play for the pawn. For example:

9 0-0 0-0 10 Bg5 Be7 11 Qd2 h6 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 Bxc6 bxc6



The two bishops offer splendid compensation. Black will soon open the position further with a timely ... c6-c5 or ... e6-e5 break, after which White is in danger of becoming worse.

A3: 7 Ne2



The most popular move.

7 ... Qb6!

7 ... e6 is more common, though in my opinion slightly inaccurate. All the same, after 8 0-0 (8 g4 Bg6 transposes to Game 12 again) 8 ... Bd6 9 Bg5 0-0 10 Nd2 (for 10 Nbc3 Be7, see line A2 above) 10 ... Qc7!, Black has decent compensation. She should soon secure the two bishops, leading to similar positions to line A2.

8 Nbc3

Or 8 Bxc6+ Qxc6! (for some reason, only the weaker 8 ... bxc6 has featured in past games) 9 Nbc3 e6 10 0-0 Rd8 11 Be3 Be7 12 Qd2 h6! and with a pair of bishops and strong pressure on White's position, Black has excellent compensation and decent chances to take over the advantage.

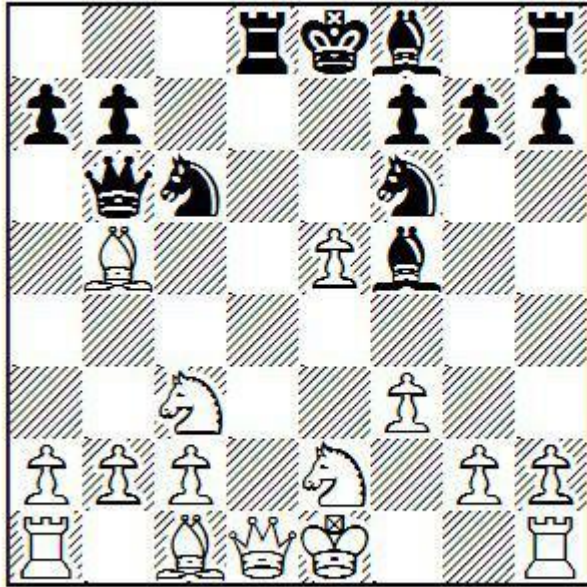
8 ... e5!?

8 ... e6 9 0-0 Bd6 is also quite respectable, but the text is far more rousing.

9 dxe5

Both 9 0-0 0-0-0 10 Bxc6 exd4! and 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 0-0 0-0-0 11 Na4 Qa6 12 c3 h5!? give Black good activity.

9 ... Rd8

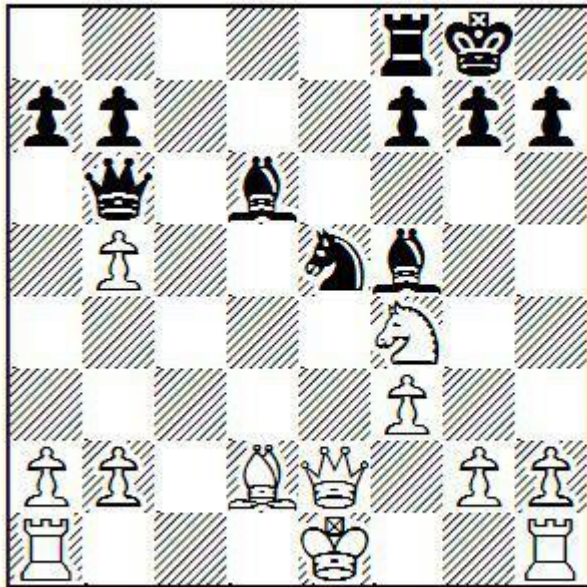


Initiating a short forcing sequence.

10 Bd2 Nd5 11 Nxd5 Rxd5 12 c4 Rxb5!?

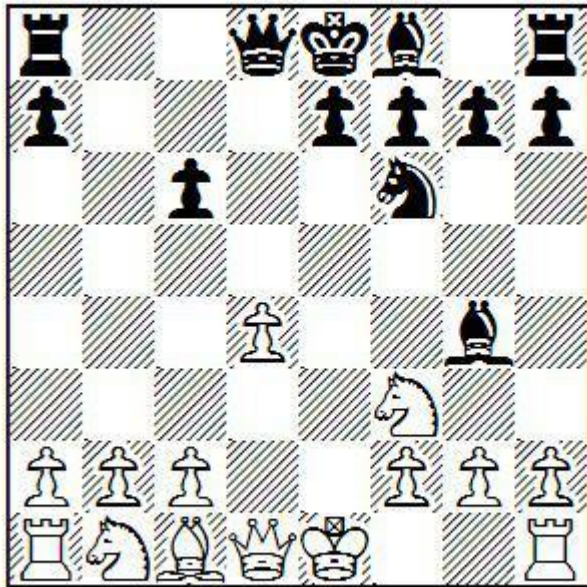
A daring sacrifice, though 12 ... Rd7 was a perfectly respectable alternative, with good compensation and strong activity for the two pawns.

13 cxb5 Nxe5 14 Nf4 Bd6! 15 Qe2 0-0



White is an exchange and a pawn ahead, but has horrible difficulties completing development, while her king remains stranded in the centre. Black has dangerous compensation for the material. Notice that castling is not an option: 16 0-0-0?? Qd4!, with threats of ... Ba3 and ... Rc8+, wins on the spot.

B: 6 Bxc6+ bxc6 7 Nf3



White's committal approach has at least forced Black into recapturing on c6 with the pawn (as we have seen, she may prefer to take with the queen in some lines). On the other hand, this has immediately granted Black the bishop pair, as well as the semi-open b-file.

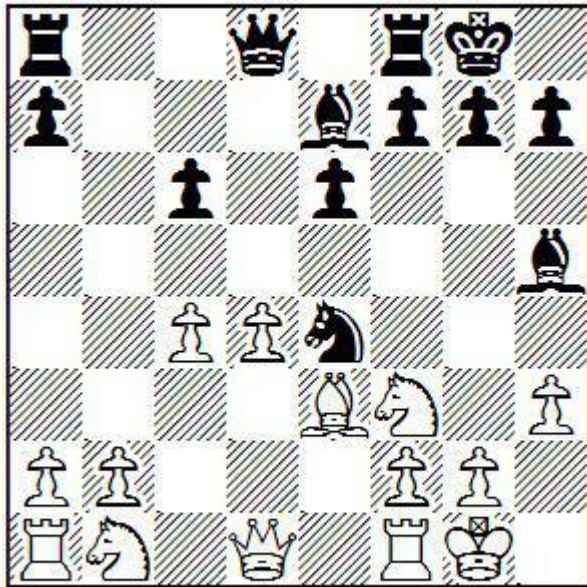
7 ... e6 8 0-0 Be7!

On d6 the bishop might get hit by a quick Nbd2-c4.

9 h3 Bh5 10 c4 0-0 11 Be3

11 Nc3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Qxd4 is level.

11 ... Ne4!?



An interesting disruption, preparing ... f7-f5.

11 ... Rb8 12 b3 Qc7 would be a more typical continuation, with some compensation for the pawn thanks to the bishop pair and pressure on the white centre. The pin on the f3-knight is particularly annoying.

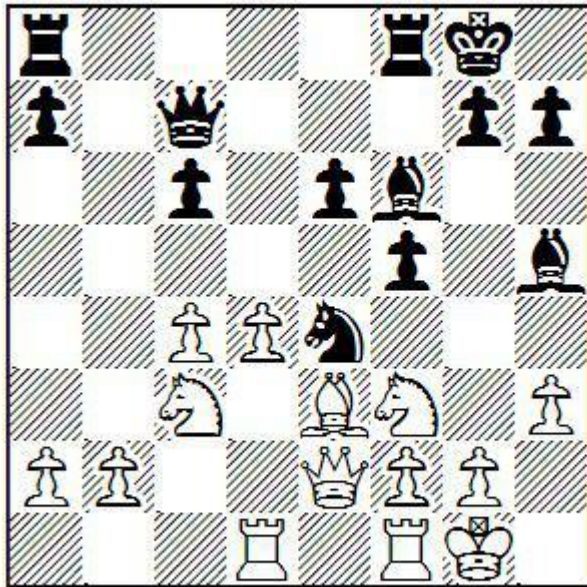
12 Nc3

After 12 Nbd2 Nxd2! 13 Qxd2 Bxf3 14 gxf3 a5, White's damaged structure provides Black with sufficient compensation.

12 ... f5! 13 Qe2

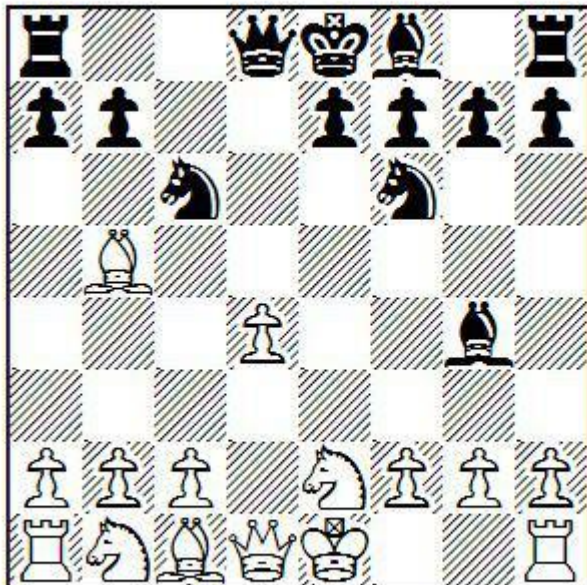
13 Re1 Bb4! is a second annoying pin, and the natural 14 Rc1? runs into the powerful sequence 14 ... Bxc3 15 bxc3 f4 16 Bd2 Ng5! with a clear advantage to Black.

13 ... Bf6 14 Rad1 Qc7



Black has an active position, a powerfully posted knight and strong pressure from her bishops. The d4-pawn is a constant worry for White, as is the potential thrust ... f5-f4. Black's compensation is almost-sufficient for the pawn, and practically difficult to handle.

C: 6 Ne2



A rather unambitious move, inviting Black to reclaim the sacrificed pawn immediately. However, Black can justify persisting with the gambit:

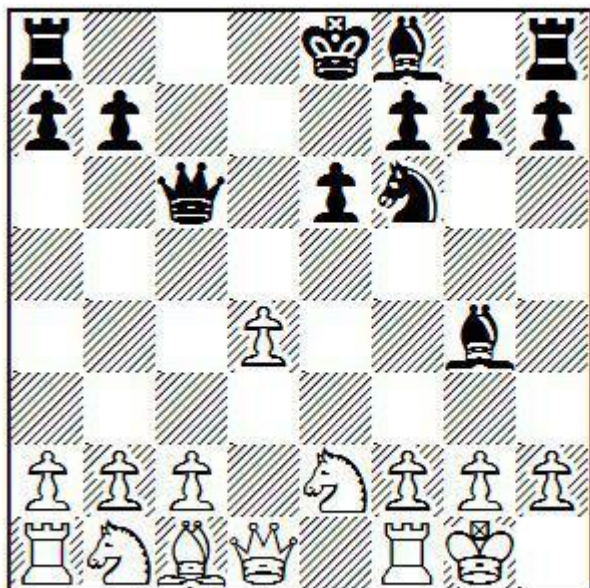
6 ... Qd5!

Alternatively:

a) 6 ... e6 7 0-0 Qb6!? 8 Nbc3 – see Game 11 (Leão-Smerdon).

b) 6 ... Bxe2 7 Qxe2 Qxd4 is indeed good enough for equality, although the resulting positions are a little stale; for example, 8 0-0 e6 9 Nc3 Be7 10 Rd1 (10 Be3 Qe5 is also equal) 10 ... Qb6 11 Be3 Qc7 with equality. Black is slightly passive in the short term, but White can make nothing of the bishop pair in this position, and will most likely exchange one of them for a black knight in the near future.

7 Bxc6+ Qxc6 8 0-0 e6

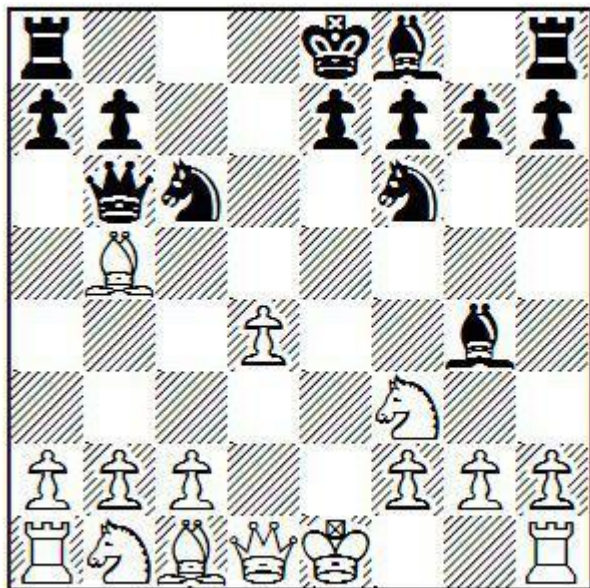


Black will continue with ... Be7, ... Rd8 and ... 0-0, whereas White will eventually have to succumb to playing f2-f3 to break the annoying pin on the e2-knight, when the permanent weaknesses of the kingside, combined with Black's superior structure and piece activity, guarantee full compensation for the pawn.

D: 6 Nf3!

The best response, after which Black has a harder task justifying her enterprising gambit.

6 ... Qb6!



Black keeps White under pressure and immediately eyes the centre, while challenging the pin on the c6-knight. White must now choose what to do with her bishop on b5. There are five possibilities, though most can be dealt with swiftly.

D1: 7 Ba4?!

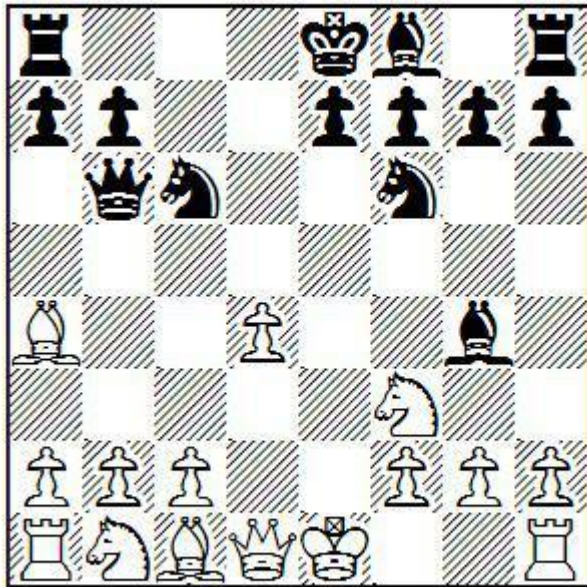
D2: 7 a4?!

D3: 7 c4

D4: 7 Nc3

D5: 7 Bxc6+

D1: 7 Ba4?!



7 ... 0-0-0!

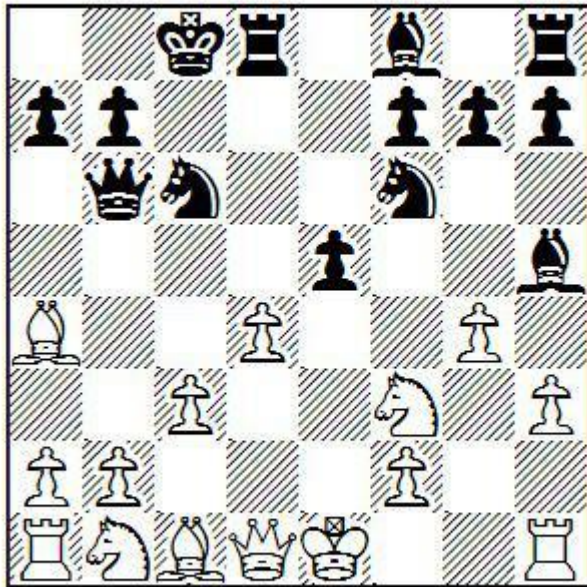
Making sure White has no respite. Already, Black can start to think about taking over the advantage.

8 c3 e5! 9 h3 Bh5! 10 g4

Instead:

a) 10 0-0?! e4! 11 g4 Nxg4! gives Black the advantage.

b) 10 Bxc6 Qxc6 11 0-0 (not 11 g4? Nxg4! and wins) 11 ... Qd5! 12 c4 (or 12 g4? Nxg4! of course!) 12 ... Qxd4 13 Nxd4 Bxd1 14 Rxd1 Bc5 and Black is better.



10 ... Bg6!

Black has a pleasant choice. 10 ... exd4!? is the sharper option: 11 gxf5 dxc3 12 Qc2 Nb4 13 Qf5+ Kb8 reaches a wild position where Black is certainly not worse; e.g. 14 Ne5 g6!! 15 Qf4 Qe6 16 0-0 Bd6 17 Re1 Qxh3 with a dangerous attack.

But note that 10 ... Nxg4? loses on this occasion to 11 hxg4 Bxg4 12 Qc2!.

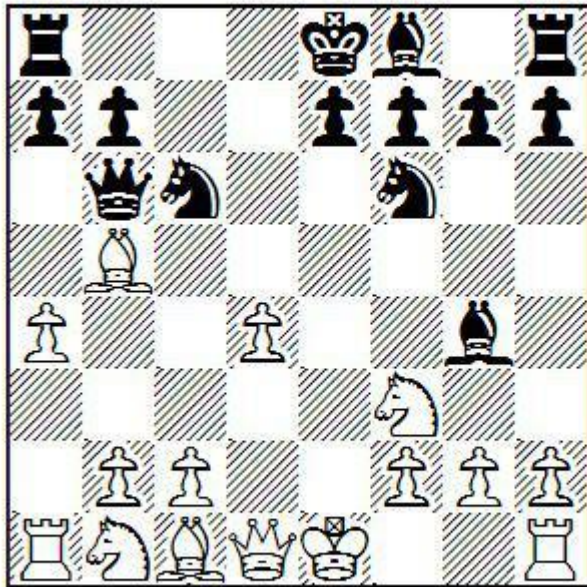
11 Bxc6

11 Qb3 exd4 12 Qxb6 axb6 13 0-0 h5! is clearly good for Black.

11 ... Qxc6 12 0-0 exd4 13 Nxd4 Qc7

Black has full compensation and the better chances.

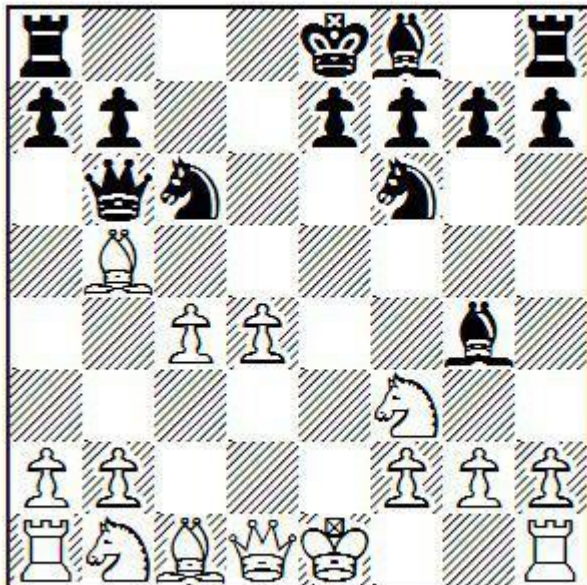
D2: 7 a4?!



7 ... 0-0-0! 8 Be3 e5!

The same remedy as in D1. The position is sharp, but not unfavourable to Black; for example, 9 c3 e4 10 h3 exf3 11 hxg4 fxg2 12 Rg1 a6! 13 Bc4 h5! and Black has the advantage.

D3: 7 c4



Better than the two previous lines; nevertheless, it is not the most challenging response to Black's sacrifice.

7 ... 0-0-0!

Again, the same treatment. The threat against d4 is renewed.

8 Bxc6

8 d5? is not possible due to 8 ... Nxd5!, while 8 Be3? Nxd4! 9 Bxd4 Qe6+! 10 Kf1 Bxf3 gives Black an overwhelming advantage.

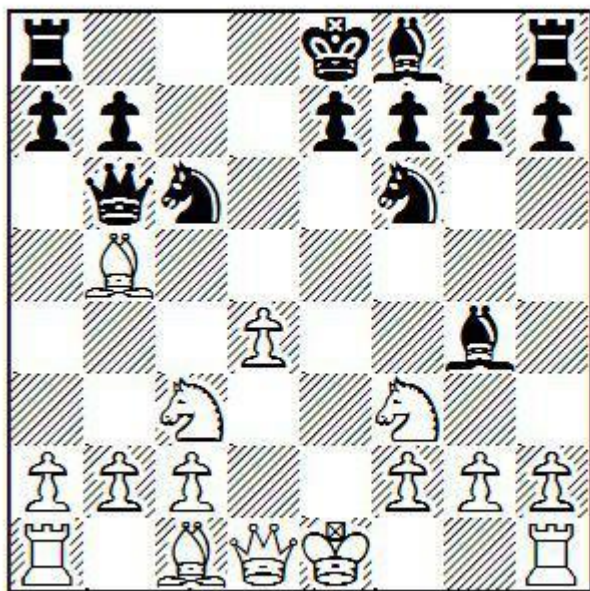
8 ... Qxc6

White must now give back the pawn.

9 Nbd2 Rxd4 10 0-0 Rd8

With an equal game.

D4: 7 Nc3



Having dealt with White's minor alternatives, we now turn to the first of her two decent options.

7 ... 0-0-0 8 Bxc6

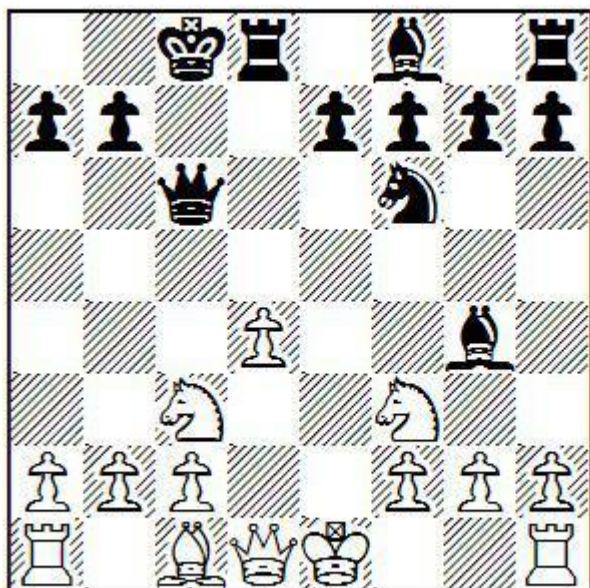
8 Qe2 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Nxd4 10 Qh3+ e6 11 Bd3 h5! is balanced.

8 ... Qxc6

A critical position for the evaluation of 4 ... c6!?. White can maintain an edge, but only with extreme accuracy. White has several options, each leading to a similar endgame structure in which Black

remains a pawn down in exchange for very good positional compensation against White's damaged structure. Moreover, the themes are common across these lines. The upshot is that you shouldn't concern yourself too much with memorizing from here, but rather try to develop a feel for the endgames by playing through the moves.

The branching is as follows:



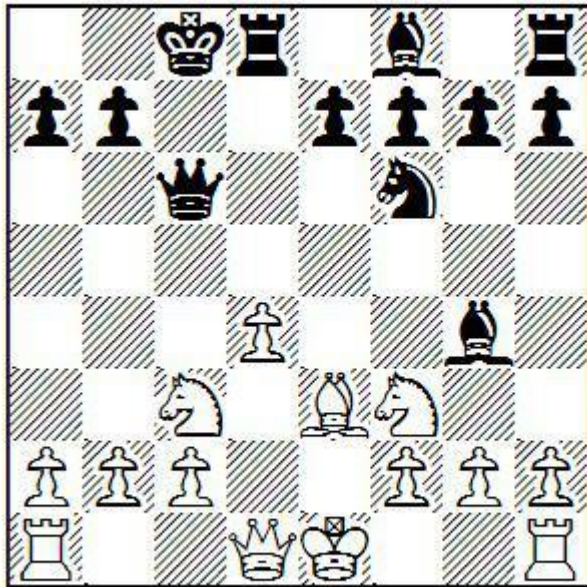
D41: 9 Be3?!

D42: 9 0-0

D43: 9 Bf4

D44: 9 h3

D41: 9 Be3?!



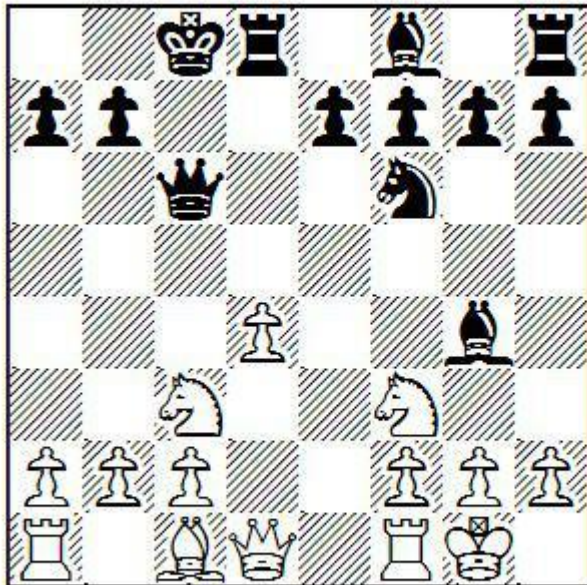
9 ... e5! 10 d5 Qa6!

An ambitious move that is very dangerous for White to face. 10 ... Nxd5 leads to an equal endgame after 11 Nxe5 Bxd1 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Rxd1 Bb4.

11 h3 Be6! 12 Nxe5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Bxd5

Black has tremendous attacking chances.

D42: 9 0-0



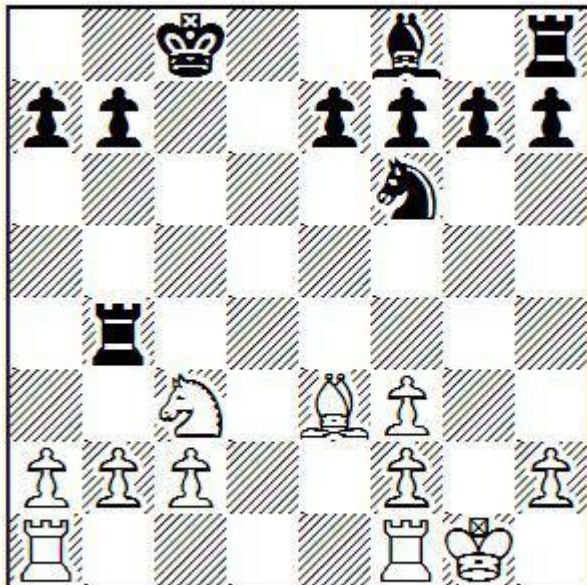
9 ... Bxf3

The standard treatment, permanently crippling White's pawn structure.

10 Qxf3

10 gxf3?! e5! favours Black.

10 ... Qxf3 11 gxf3 Rxd4 12 Be3 Rb4!



An important sequence to secure equality.

13 b3

13 Bxa7 Rxb2 14 Rab1 Rxc2 15 Rfc1 Rxc1+ 16 Rxc1 looks dangerous, but is in reality “all hat and no cattle”, as the cowboys say (*Boston Legal*, in case you’re counting American TV series references): 16 ... Kd7! 17 Rb1 Kc6! with advantage to Black.

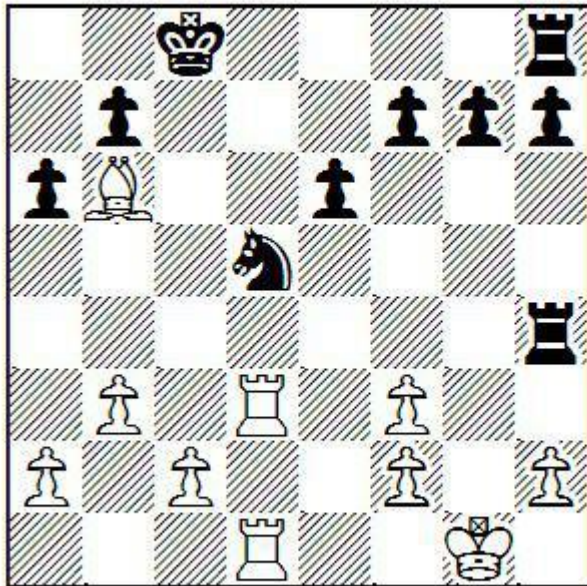
13 ... a6! 14 Rfd1

14 f4 Ng4! ensures that Black’s rook will be able to return to safety via b6.

14 ... Rh4!

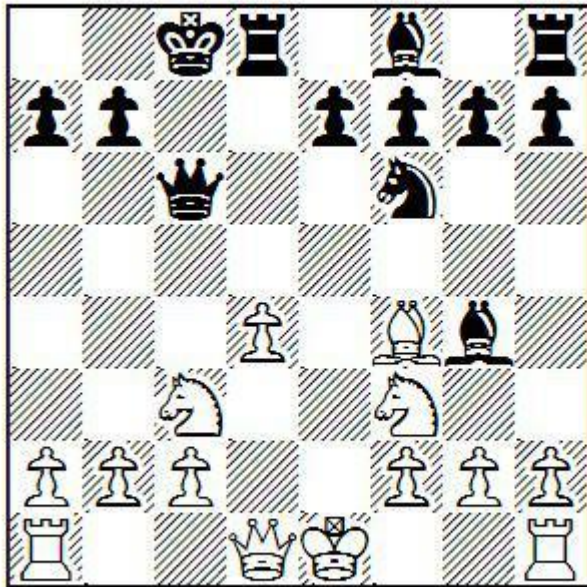
Getting the rook safe is the priority. 14 ... e6? 15 Bd4! leaves Black’s rook stranded on b4.

15 Na4 e6 16 Rd3 Bb4! 17 Rad1 Ba5 18 Nb6+ Bxb6 19 Bxb6 Nd5



Black has successfully neutralized White’s initiative. Chances in the endgame are level.

D43: 9 Bf4



9 ... Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Qxf3

Black can actually regain her pawn with 10 ... Rxd4 11 Be3 Rc4! because of the trick 12 Bxa7 b6!, but 11 Qe3! gives White a more promising position despite the material equality.

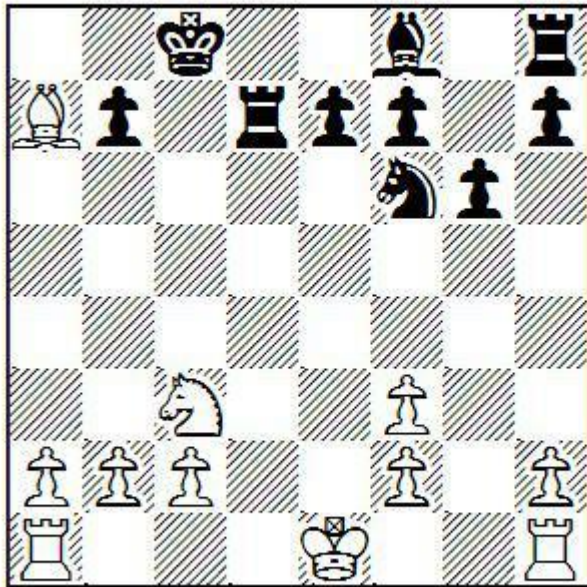
11 gxf3 Rxd4

Interestingly, most strong engines prefer to play with the pawns on d4 and a7 (via 11 ... Nd5!?) in these endgames, invariably leading to a draw in my simulations. Personally, I find the positions with one fewer set of pawns easier to understand, but it's comforting to know that even the engines seem to agree that the endgame is fundamentally equal.

12 Be3 Rd7

But not 12 ... Rb4?! 13 b3! and White threatens h2-h4, after which Black's rook is in danger of becoming trapped. (Note that this was not possible if White had 'gained' a move with 9 0-0.) Here the game could continue 13 ... e6 14 h4! Nd5 15 Nxd5 exd5 16 c3! Rb5 17 b4! with a clear advantage to White.

13 Bxa7 g6



This sort of endgame is typical of this variation, should White successfully navigate the opening tactics. White has managed to keep her extra pawn, but Black has ‘almost-sufficient’ compensation in the endgame. If that sounds like a bit of hand-waving on your author’s part, I suggest you run this position on your computer for a while and let it guide your opinion. Chances are it will tell you something in the range of +0.3 to +0.4.

Checked it? Good. Now, allow me to give you some intuition behind the source of Black’s compensation. Front and centre, of course, is White’s weakened kingside pawn structure. It is hard to see her ever eliminating the weaknesses, as Black can always set up an h5/g6/f7/e6 pawn blockade. More importantly, however, is the weakness of White’s isolated h-pawn. In fact, it is so weak that White can often fall worse if all the rooks are exchanged and Black can attack the pawn with ... Bg7-e5 and ... Nh5-f4.

More immediate concerns for White are her loose bishop on a7 and knight on c3, which is soon to be pinned to the b2-pawn via Black’s ... Bg7. If she decides to do nothing, Black can often play ... Bxc3 to create another set of pawn weaknesses – after which, again, White has to be careful not to drift into an inferior position, despite her extra pawn.

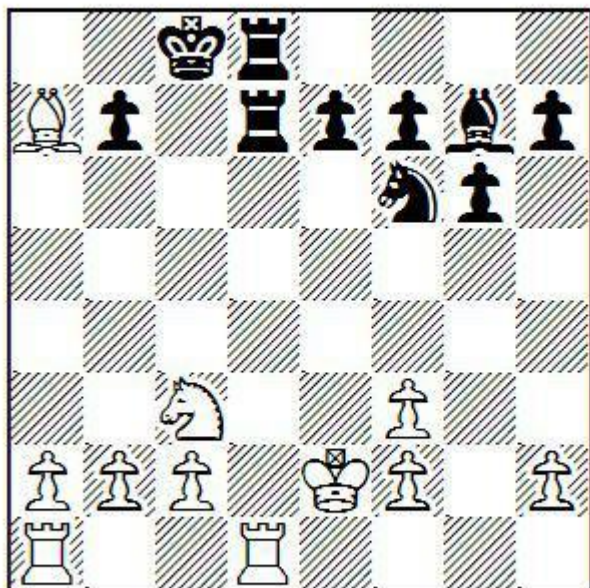
So, as you can see, things aren't as simple as they first appear. Again, I should stress that, objectively, White is better here. However, if you study this chapter carefully and get a deep understanding of this endgame, you can ensure that you are the better prepared player should these positions ever arise on your board. If you do this, you can be confident of at least holding the draw, and perhaps feel optimistic that, if your opponent plays carelessly, you might be able to snatch the whole point.

A plausible continuation could be:

14 Ke2

Or 14 Rg1 and now not 14 ... Bg7?! 15 Rg5! with an initiative, but the cautious 14 ... e6! with good compensation. For example, 15 Rg5?! Bb4! 16 a3 Bxc3+ 17 bxc3 Nd5 18 c4, when Black can either force a drawn rook ending immediately after 18 ... b6 19 cxd5 Rxa7 20 dxe6 Re8!, or play for more with 18 ... f6.

14 ... Bg7 15 Rhd1 Rhd8



16 Rxd7

16 Na4 Nd5 17 Be3 Rd6 18 Rxd5 Rxd5 19 Nb6+ Kc7 20 Nxd5+ Rxd5 should end in a draw. White has too many pawn weaknesses to make anything real out of her queenside majority.

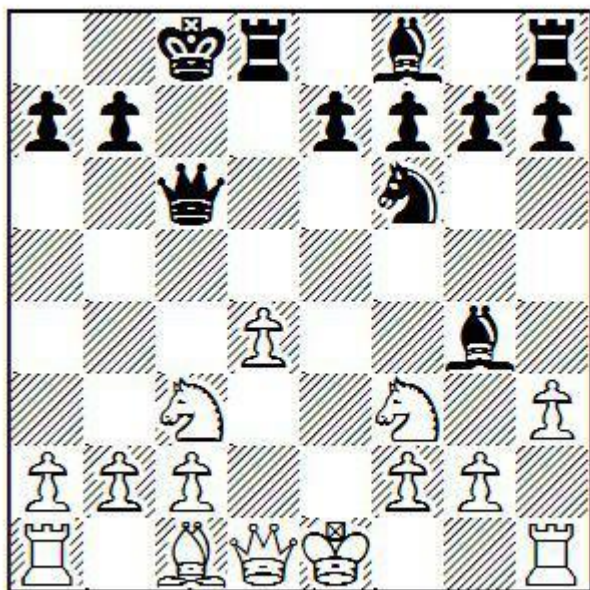
16 ... Nxd7!

Threatening 17 ... b6. Alternatively, 16 ... Rxd7 should be equal too, because 17 Rd1 Nh5! 18 Rxd7?! Nf4+ 19 Ke3 Ng2+ 20 Ke4 Kxd7 is starting to look good for Black.

17 Be3 Bxc3!? 18 bxc3 Kc7

The endgame remains unbalanced with chances for both sides.

D44: 9 h3

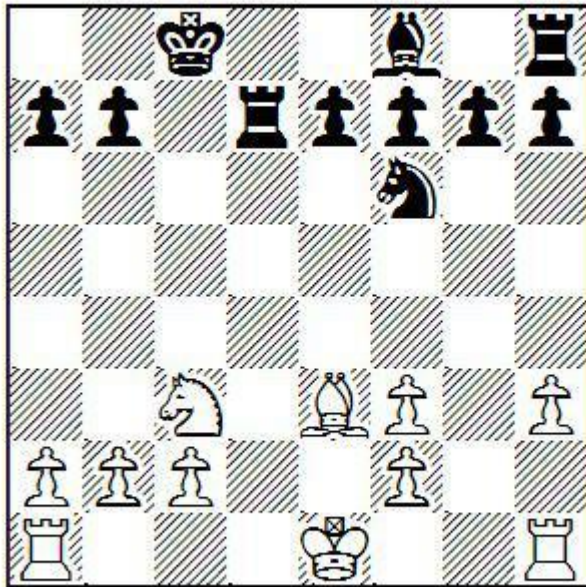


This move is similar to 9 Bf4 and leads to the same sorts of endgames described above.

9 ... Bxf3 10 Qxf3 Qxf3

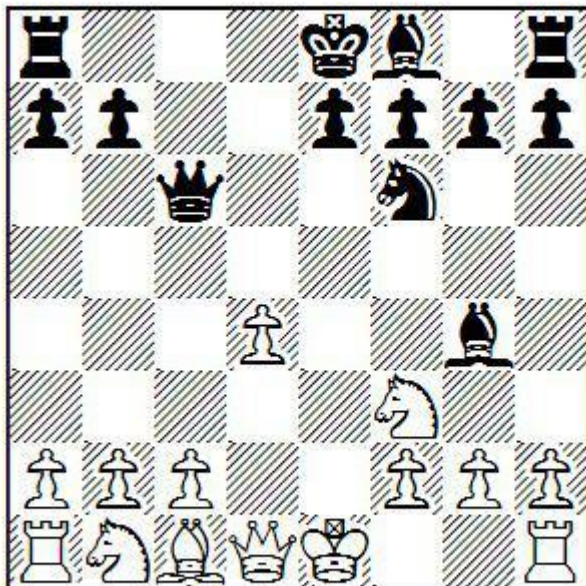
10 ... Rxd4!? is a way of exploiting White's slightly inaccurate ninth move. As long as she continues precisely, Black wins her pawn back and achieves an equal endgame thanks to the clever trick 11 Be3 Rc4! 12 Bxa7 b6 13 Qxc6+ (13 Bxb6 Qxb6 14 Qa8+ Kc7 15 Rd1 Qe6+ 16 Kf1 Qc6 is a draw) 13 ... Rxc6, and if 14 Na4! then 14 ... Re6+ 15 Kf1 Re4! 16 b3 Kb7 17 Bxb6 Rxa4 18 bxa4 Kxb6 with chances for both sides.

11 gxf3 Rxd4 12 Be3 Rd7!



We have reached a position from D43 with the largely irrelevant difference that White's pawn is on h3 instead of h2. Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn.

D5: 7 Bxc6 Qxc6!



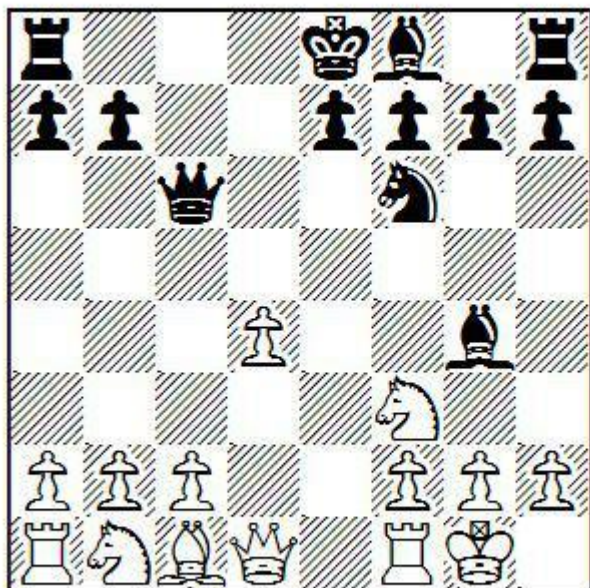
This could properly be called the main line of the Elbow. White's best move is 8 h3, seeking to force the endgames that characterize D4 above, with the extra flexibility of being able to play Nd2 and c2-c3. The two alternatives are somewhat weaker.

D51: 8 0-0

D52: 8 h3

Instead, 8 Be3 can be safely answered by 8 ... Rc8 or 8 ... e6, reaching positions similar to those discussed in line D51 below. Alternatively, 8 ... Bxf3!? 9 Qxf3 Qxf3 10 gxf3 Rc8 11 Kd2 e6 saw Black draw with little difficulty in Ma.Marie-A.Mevel, Avoine 2006.

D51: 8 0-0



8 ... e6

8 ... Bxf3!? 9 Qxf3 Qxf3 10 gxf3 Rc8 11 c3 Nd5 gives Black almost-sufficient compensation in the endgame.

9 c3

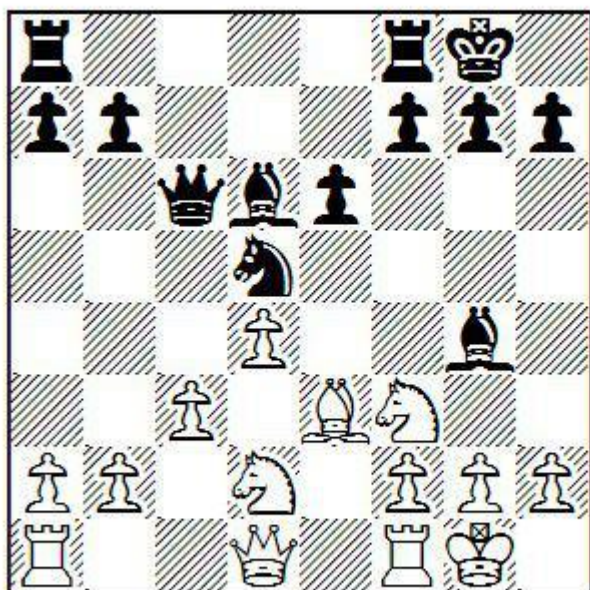
9 Bf4 Rc8 (or again 9 ... Bxf3!? 10 Qxf3 Qxf3 11 gxf3 Nd5 12 Be3 Rc8 13 c3 f5! and Black is very comfortable; ... Kf7 and ... g7-g5 form a straightforward short-term plan) 10 c3 and now 10 ... Nh5!?

was a slightly less usual way of playing for endgame compensation (10 ... Bxf3 was of course still possible). After 11 Be3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Qxf3 13 gxf3 f5 14 Re1?! Kf7 15 Bc1 Bd6 16 Nd2 g5!, Black had no problems at all in A.Engelhart-R.Lutzenberger, Illertissen 2005, but the small tactical operation beginning with 14 d5! would have given White a clear advantage.

9 ... Bd6!?

Black decides not to enter the endgame just yet, keeping the tension by maintaining the pin on White's f3-knight.

10 Be3 0-0 11 Nbd2 Nd5!

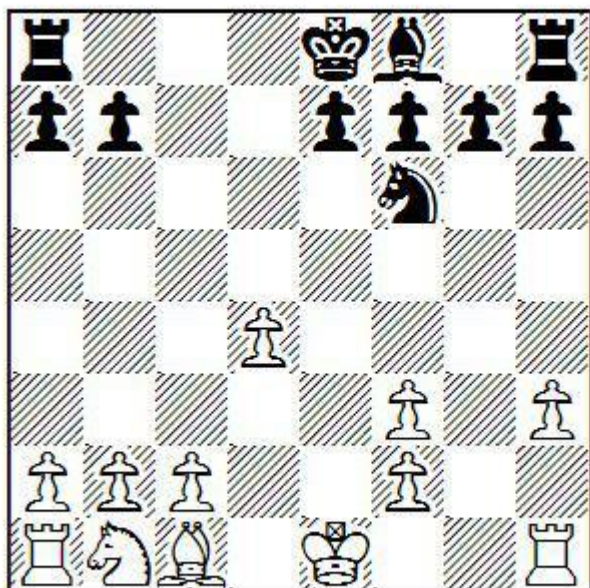


This is another typical position for this variation that is worth getting your head around. Despite no obvious attacking chances against the white king, Black's activity and bishop pair fully compensate her for the pawn deficit. The key to playing these positions is to remain calm and bring the pieces to natural squares, while always remaining on the lookout for the more combative opportunities that will inevitably arise.

For example, after 12 c4 Nf4 13 h3 Bh5 14 Rc1 Rad8! 15 Rc3 Bb8 16 Re1 (or 16 g3 Nxh3+ 17 Kg2 e5! 18 d5 Qc8 19 Rh1 Bg4! and Black is in time to keep everything under control) 16 ... Rfe8, it is already becoming difficult for White to find useful moves. Black has

sufficient compensation for the pawn, and an easier game in practice.

D52: 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Qxf3 10 gxf3



So we arrive at the cusp of the Elbow, so to speak. White has successfully navigated the traps and pitfalls of the opening and managed to keep her extra pawn at the expense of some structural concessions. The diagram is again an example of the key type of endgames that can arise if White plays accurately.

Compared with the positions arising after 7 Nc3, each side has an extra pawn (on d4 and a7, respectively), though it is not clear who this favours. On the one hand, White has more control over the centre. On the other, the d4-pawn will be a target that requires constant attention, and it is consequently more difficult for White to find a harmonious deployment of her minor pieces.

Of course, only White can be objectively better in this position, which is a practical problem for our repertoire. From another angle, however, it is clear that White has to show a lot of prowess to get this far, and still, with best play, Black should hold her own and take away at least half a point.

Let's look a little deeper:

10 ... Nd5

This immediately cuts out White's Nc3 options, as well as making way for the f-pawn to warm up.

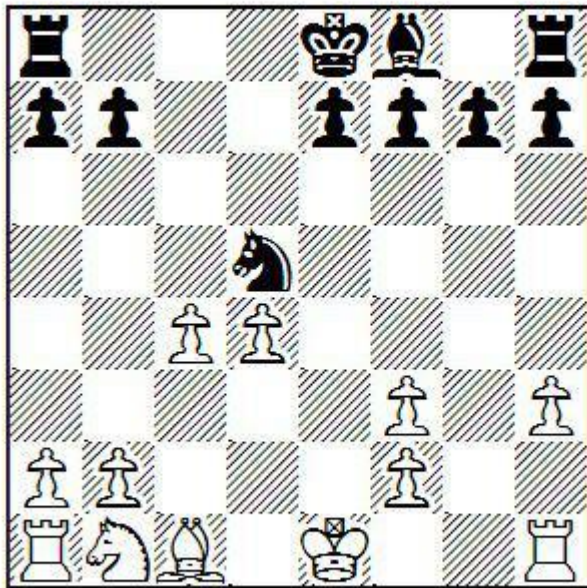
11 c3

Instead:

a) 11 Nc3 Nb4! will be followed by queenside castling. Black is already equal.

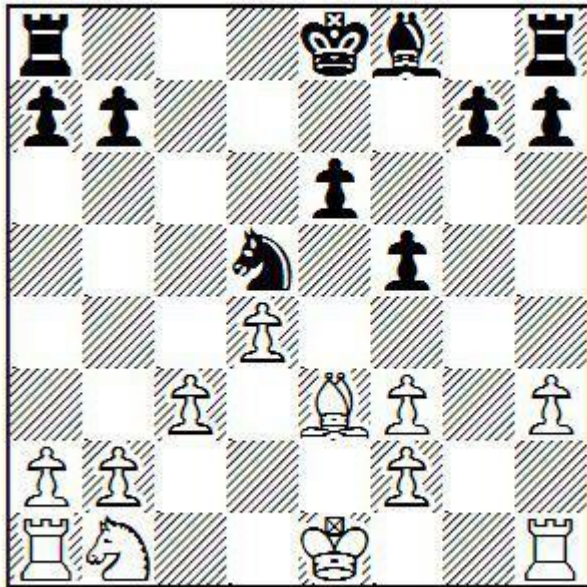
b) 11 Be3 Rc8 12 c3 f5! is level. We will return to this idea below.

c) 11 c4! is probably best, simultaneously making use of the agile c-pawn, the possibility of developing the knight to a3, and potentially mobilizing the king actively in the centre. This extra flexibility explains the strength of 8 h3 over other moves.



After 11 ... Nb4 12 Na3, Black can try to force matters with 12 ... 0-0 (12 ... e6 13 Be3 Be7 is another promising direction, more in harmony with the themes of comparable lines) 13 Be3 e5! 14 dxe5 Nd3+ 15 Ke2 Bxa3 16 bxa3 Nxe5 and with such a superior structure, Black should hold this position, though some care is required. Note that 17 Bxa7 Nc6 18 Be3 Nd4+ 19 Bxd4 Rxd4 leads to a drawn rook endgame.

11 ... e6 12 Be3 f5!



A very important idea to remember. Black makes it difficult for White to complete her development (13 Nd2?? loses to 13 ... f4!), while any attempt to counter with f3-f4 would present a juicy target for Black's minor pieces. For her part, Black has many ideas to improve her position, typically involving ... Rc8, ... Kf7, ... Bd6, ... Rhd8, and always keeping an eye out for the possibility of kingside expansion with ... h7-h6 and ... g7-g5. It is my opinion that the position is fundamentally balanced at this point, a view supported by many engine-vs-engine simulations I have run.

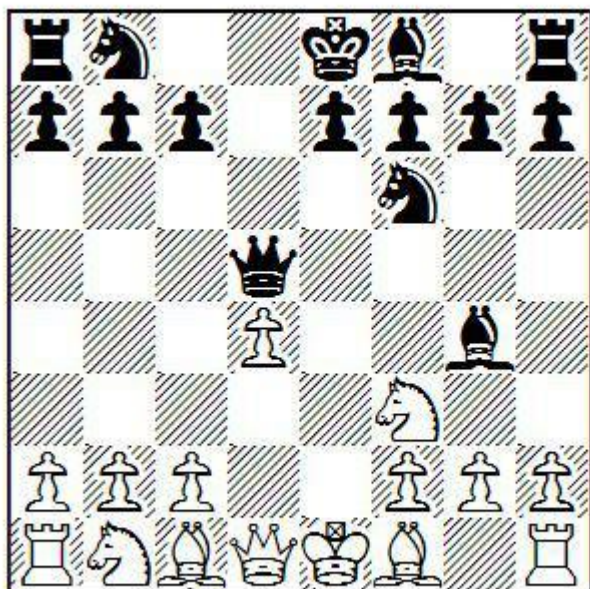
A plausible continuation is 13 a4 Rc8 14 Na3 Kf7 15 Nc2 Bd6 16 a5 Rc6 17 0-0 g5! 18 Kg2 f4! 19 Bd2 Ne7 with a dangerous kingside initiative. Black is at least equal.

Chapter Eight

The Classical

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Nf3 Qxd5



This is a very popular line in practice, as it can occur both from the stated move-order and via 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 d4. It is often employed by opponents who, when surprised by 3 ... Bg4, take the attitude, "Surely simple development can't be wrong." On the contrary, Black can quickly whip up dangerous pressure on the d4-pawn with ... Nc6, ... 0-0-0 and ... e7-e5 (usually after swinging the queen to the kingside).

Given that the kings will be castled on opposite wings, it should come as no surprise that Black can plan a rapid attack against the white monarch. When the black queen is eventually persuaded to relocate (after Nc3 or c2-c4, or even voluntarily), she often chooses between h5 and f5. Clearly h5 is the more aggressive post, but it

should be noted that Black is then committed to answering h2-h3 with a piece sacrifice by playing a quick ... e7-e5!. Such sacrifices don't tend to work with the queen on f5; from here, Black can answer h2-h3 with ... Bxf3 and usually ... e7-e5 anyway. As a general rule of thumb, f5 is your default square after c2-c4 or if you need to move it voluntarily, while Nc3 can usually be answered by ... Qh5. Another way of looking at it is that f5 is generally always a safe choice for your queen, even after Nc3.

I have an excellent score in the Classical, perhaps the highest out of all variations in our system. In my experience, the Wuss and the Classical are the two anti-Portuguese variations in which you will encounter the greatest number of opponents who don't know the theory and are simply looking for a safe way to escape the opening. In the Classical, however, this is a very dubious strategy. Rather than a safe choice, this variation demands precision and theoretical preparedness from White in order to stay afloat. Become familiar with the traps and tricks in the lines that follow, and you will be able to score yourself many, many easy points.

It should be noted that the Classical variation often transposes to either the 2 ... Qxd5 Scandinavian or the Nimzowitsch Defence (1 e4 Nc6), although there are some differences in our system as Black has already committed to ... Nf6. This means there is a small percentage of players who are familiar with the white side of things from other systems, and therefore may be well versed in the intricacies of the Classical. I faced such an opponent in our first illustrative game. My point is that you shouldn't automatically assume that you are facing a theoretically naive opponent just because they play in this fashion, even if the chances of this at club levels are statistically high.

What follows may seem like a mass of cross-references and variations, but don't worry: the actual material required by Black to master this line is quite moderate. Many of the variations transpose, depending on White's chosen move-order, and rarely does the exact sequence affect Black's standard plan of ... Nc6, ... 0-0-0, ... Qh5/f5 and ... e7-e5. I have tried to be as thorough as possible with detailing all likely move-orders, but this is more for your personal reference than a request to memorize each line.

But before we wade into the jungle, let's again ease ourselves in by looking at some model games.

Game 13

I.Rogers-D.Smerdon

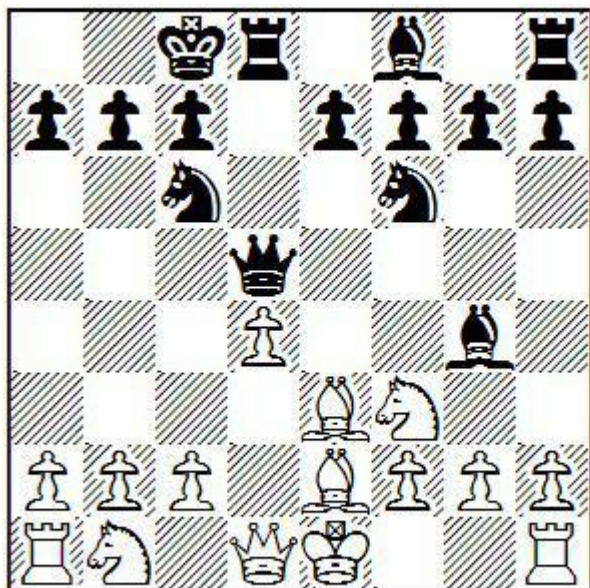
Australian Championship, Brisbane 2006

This game was crucial to obtaining my first grandmaster norm. Ian Rogers was at the time (and for several decades prior) the strongest player in Australia, as well as being known as the world's top expert on the 2 ... Qxd5 Scandinavian.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Nf3 Qxd5 5 Be2 Nc6 6 Be3

It is worth remembering that 6 0-0 0-0-0 7 c4? is not a direct transposition, as 7 ... Qh5! favours Black; for example, 8 Be3 (8 d5 e6 wins a pawn, *runic2* (2450)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012) 8 ... e5! 9 h3 (9 d5?? e4 immediately ended the games *chesskid* (2500)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012, and De.Stojanovski-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014) 9 ... exd4! 10 hxg4 Nxg4 11 Bg5 f6 12 Bh4 d3! with a crushing advantage.

6 ... 0-0-0





Australian GM Ian Rogers – one of the world's best 2 ... Qxd5 Scandinavian players – almost turned into a Scandinavian slayer against the author. (photo: Cathy Rogers)

As already mentioned, the Classical has a huge mass of transpositions within its lines; but don't let this put you off. Rather, you should see it as an advantage, because you are far more likely to be familiar with the theory than your opponents, and therefore the chances of catching them out in an opening trap aren't bad at all. The main theme to remember is being aware of the pressure on d4, which can often be exploited by tactical means.

7 0-0

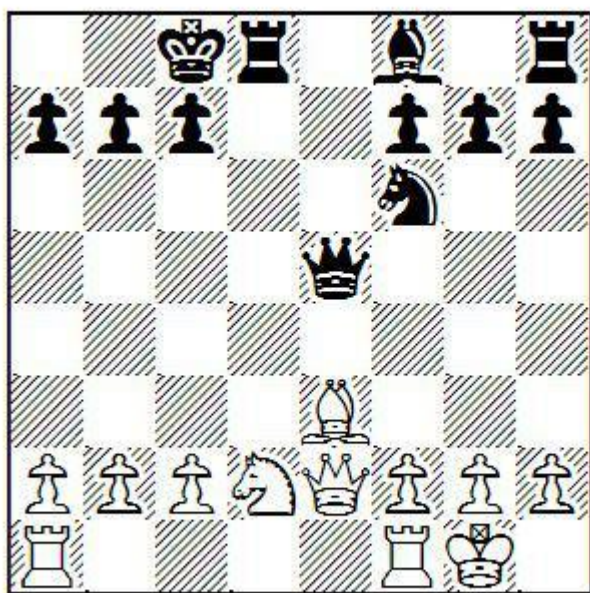
After 7 c4 (7 Nc3?! Qf5! already favours Black) 7 ... Qf5! 8 Nc3 (I have faced the weak 8 Nbd2?! many times in blitz, so I advise memorizing this simple remedy: 8 ... e5! 9 d5 Nb4! 10 0-0 Nc2! 11 Rc1 Nxe3 12 fxe3 Bc5 with a clear advantage to Black, *TheChessObserver* (2358)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014) 8 ... e5 9 d5 Bxf3! 10 Bxf3 Nd4! 11 Bxd4 exd4 12 Qxd4 Re8+, Black has dangerous compensation for the pawn.

7 ... Qf5! 8 Nbd2

Here 8 c4! is White's most dangerous option (see Game 15), while 8 h3? Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Nxd4! 10 Bxd4 e5 leaves Black with a slight advantage after 11 c3 exd4 12 cxd4 c6.

8 ... e5 9 dxe5 Nxe5 10 Nxe5 Bxe2 11 Qxe2 Qxe5

A key endgame for this variation. It may look a little stale, but bear in mind that White has had to navigate a minefield of pitfalls in order to reach a position in which, objectively, there is no advantage to be had. Still, Black must be precise over the next few moves in order to secure equality.



12 Nf3

12 Nc4 Qe4! 13 Rfe1 Bd6 is equal.

12 ... Qe4! 13 Rfe1

In the theory, I've shown the following line: 13 Ng5 Qg6 14 Qc4 Rd5! 15 f4 a6 16 Rad1 c6 17 Bd4! h6 18 Bxf6 Bc5+ 19 Bd4 Bxd4+ 20 Rxd4 Rxd4 21 Qxd4 hxg5 22 fxg5 Qxg5 23 Rxf7 Rd8! with a draw. Not all forced, of course, but Black's position is resilient to other options as well.

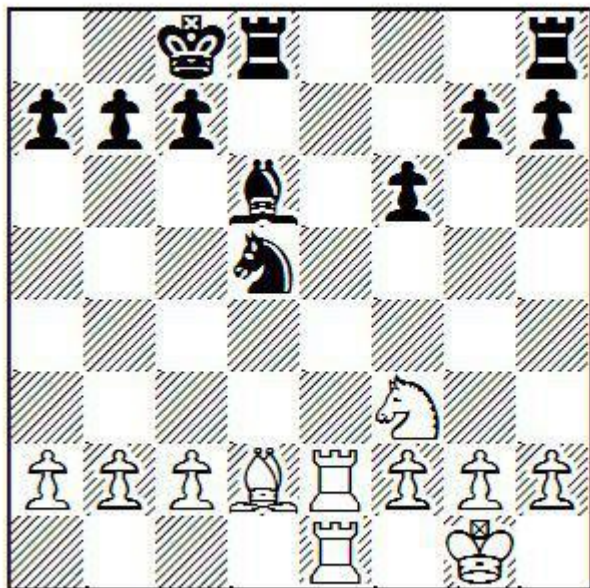
13 ... Nd5

13 ... Bd6! may be simpler – see the theory section.

14 Bg5 Qxe2 15 Rxe2 f6 16 Bd2 Bd6

Alternatively, 16 ... Bc5 17 Rae1 Kd7! intends to swap rooks on the e-file, while 18 c4 Nb4! 19 a3 Nd3! achieves nothing for White.

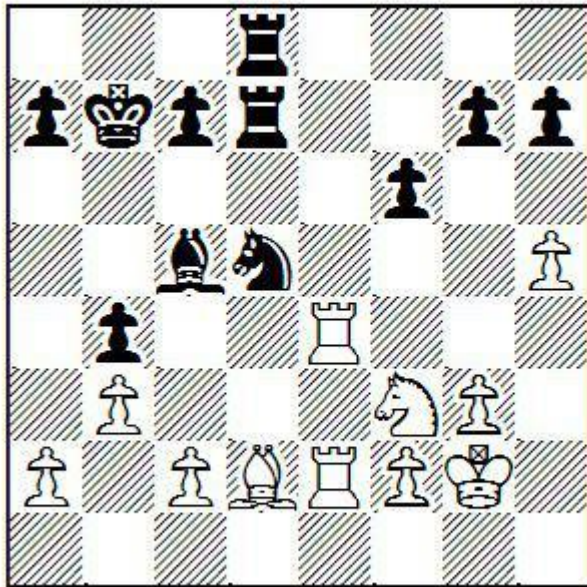
17 Rae1



17 ... Rd7

17 ... Kd7 was again an easy solution to completely level the contest; whereas now Australia's most famous grandmaster proceeds to outplay my younger self.

18 g3 Bc5 19 h4 b5 20 Kg2 Rhd8 21 h5 Nb6 22 b3 Nd5 23 Re4 Kb7 24 R1e2 b4



Black would have preferred not to have weakened the c4-square, but this in itself is not fatal.

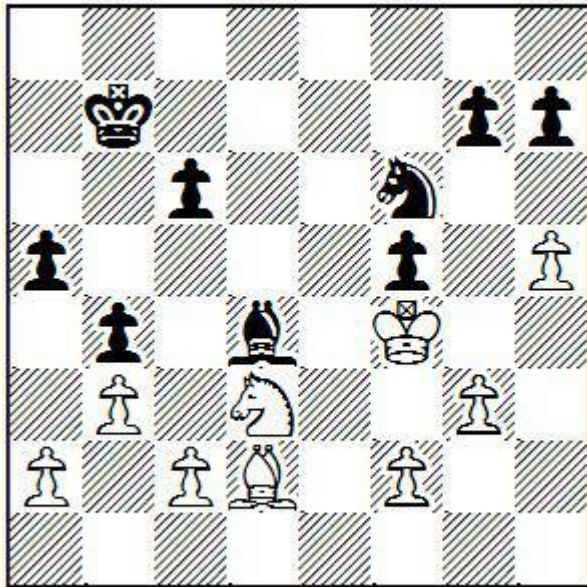
25 Ne1! f5?!

Presenting White with a second target. 25 ... a5 26 Nd3 Bb6 27 Nb2 Ra8 would have led to stoical defence.

26 Re6 Bd4 27 Nd3 a5 28 Kf3 c6 29 Re1 Kb6 30 Re8

Perhaps 30 Ne5 offered better chances, though after 30 ... Bxe5 31 R1xe5 Rf8!, Black's knight seems to hold the position together.

30 ... Rxe8 31 Rxe8 Nf6! 32 Rb8+ Rb7 33 Rxb7+ Kxb7 34 Kf4!



The activity of White's king ensures a small edge, although the reduced material also provides extra drawing opportunities.

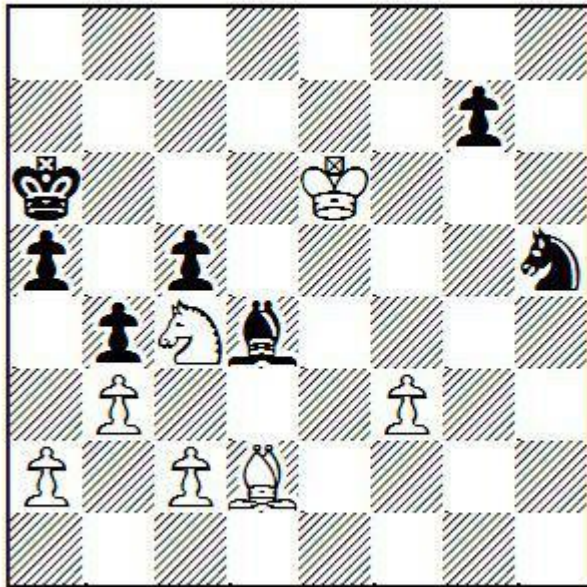
34 ... Nxh5+ 35 Kxf5 Nf6 36 f3 c5

36 ... Nd5 37 Ke6 didn't appeal to me.

37 Ne5 Nh5

Desperately seeking activity for the knight.

38 g4 Ng3+ 39 Ke6 h5!? 40 gxh5 Nxh5 41 Nc4 Ka6



42 Bg5

Missing an opportunity for a small tactic: 42 a4! bxa3 43 Nxa3 Ng3 44 Nc4 would have picked up the a-pawn and preserved good winning chances.

42 ... Ng3 43 Bd8 a4! 44 bxa4 Ne2

Finally, after a long journey through the barren white kingside, the black knight finds a use for itself.

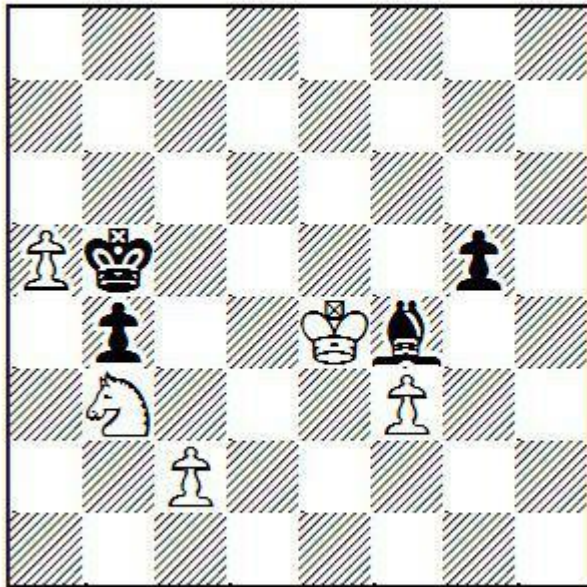
45 a5? Nc3

45 ... Bg1! draws immediately, but the text is good enough too.

46 a3 Nb5! 47 axb4 cxb4 48 Be7 Bc3 49 Bc5 Nd4+ 50 Bxd4 Bxd4 51 Nd2

51 Kd5 Bc3 52 Kc5 Be1 draws.

51 ... Kb5 52 Nb3 Be3 53 Kd5 g5 54 Ke4 Bf4



The draw is secured.

**55 Kd4 Bc7 56 a6 Bb6+ 57 Kd5 Be3 58 Ke4 Bf2 59 Kd3 Kxa6
60 Kc4 Be1 61 Nc5+ Ka5 62 Ne4 Bh4 ½-½**

Black could have made things a lot easier by taking the smart route to equality on move sixteen, but the result remained the same!

Game 14

T.Nabaty-B.Chatalbashev

Eforie Nord 2010

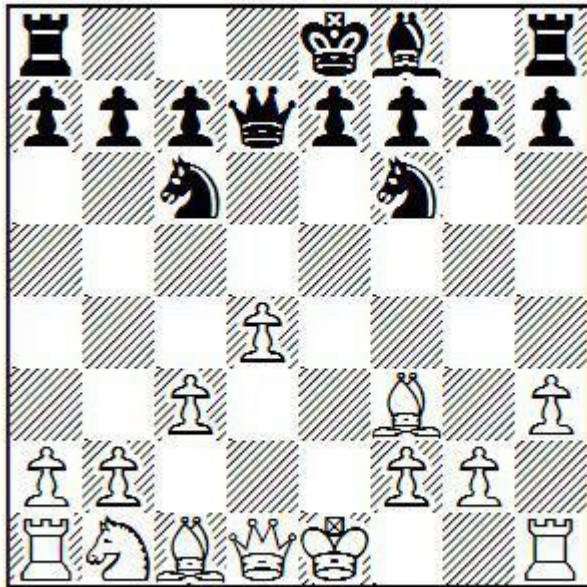
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Nf3 Qxd5

The actual move-order of the game was 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 d4 Bg4.

5 Be2 Nc6 6 h3

6 c3 0-0-0 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 transposes, while 7 Qa4? and 7 Qb3? can both be met by 7 ... e5 with an advantage to Black.

6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Qd7 8 c3



This position can arise from various move-orders, so it is worth remembering. White has won the bishop pair, at the cost of falling slightly behind in development. Black should try to make use of the tricky knight pair while the position remains semi-closed and create threats against the white centre and kingside.

8 ... e5!

8 ... 0-0-0 is possible, but after 9 Qb3 Black no longer has the option of ... e7-e5 due to the weakness of the b7-pawn. Still, 9 ... e6 10 0-0 Nd5!?, intending ... Be7 and marching the g-pawn at the white king, is perfectly playable.

9 d5

Instead:

a) 9 dxe5 is a common choice if White is looking for a safer life, though the endgame after 9 ... Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 0-0-0+ 11 Kc2 Nxe5 is anything but stale. For example, 12 Be2 Bc5 and Black was at least equal in A.Gonzalez Perez-D.Smerdon, Rianxo (rapid) 2014.

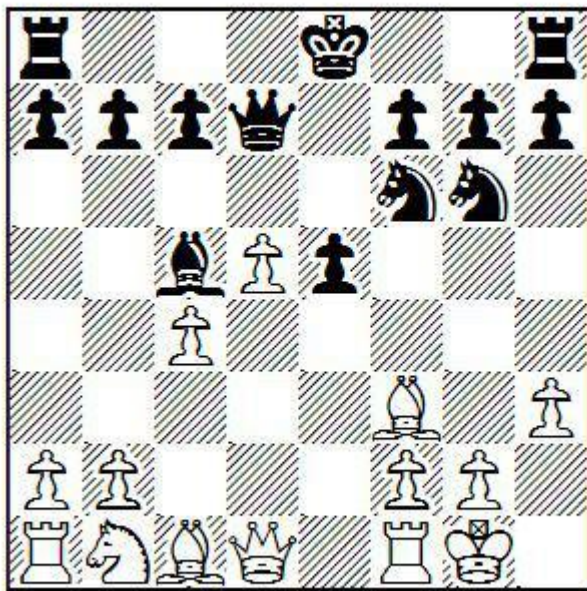
b) 9 0-0 exd4 10 Qb3! is another position that can be reached via multiple move-orders, though Black should try to avoid it if possible. Now one sequence to remember is 10 ... 0-0-0 (10 ... Rb8!?) 11 cxd4 Qxd4 (11 ... Qe6!?) 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Be3 Qb4 14 Qxf7 Nd5! with

complicated play where White is slightly better, but Black has trumps that should not be discarded.

9 ... Ne7 10 c4 Ng6

10 ... Nf5! is a nice novelty. The idea of transferring the knight to the kingside is the same, but from here the black knight can also eye the d4-square. Then 11 0-0 Bc5 12 Re1 0-0! leaves the game balanced, as capturing the e-pawn would give Black's rooks dangerous control of the e-file.

11 0-0 Bc5



The position reminds me of the Black Knights' Tango (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 Nc6!?) or some sort of declined Budapest Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e5 3 d5?!). The black pieces dominate the central dark squares and point ominously towards the white king.

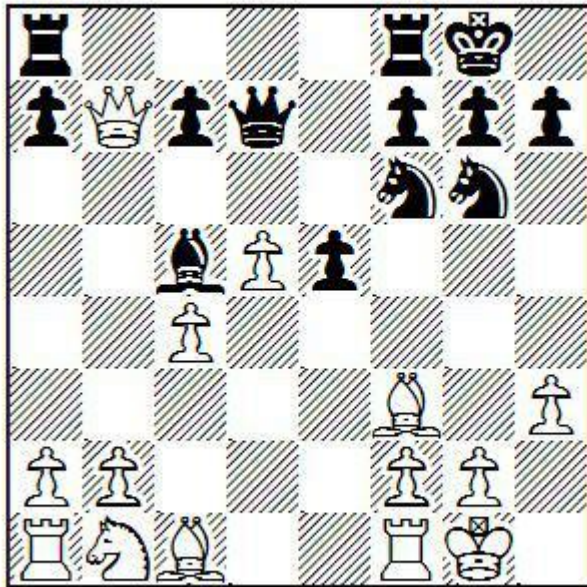
12 Qb3

12 Nc3 was more sensible.

12 ... 0-0

Black offers the poisoned apple. 12 ... e4!? 13 Be3! exf3 14 Bxc5 fxg2 15 Re1+ Kd8 would have led to a wildly complicated position with chances for both sides.

13 Qxb7?

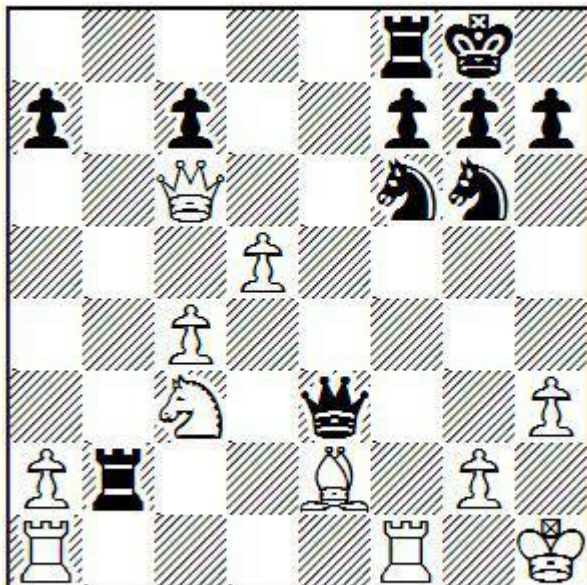


Far too greedy! As Marshall used to advise: "Never take the queen's knight's pawn with your queen!"

13 ... e4! 14 Be2 Rab8! 15 Qc6 Qe7 16 Nc3 e3!

Excellent play! Black blasts open the position before White's queen has time to return to the defence.

17 fxe3 Bxe3+ 18 Bxe3 Qxe3+ 19 Kh1 Rxb2



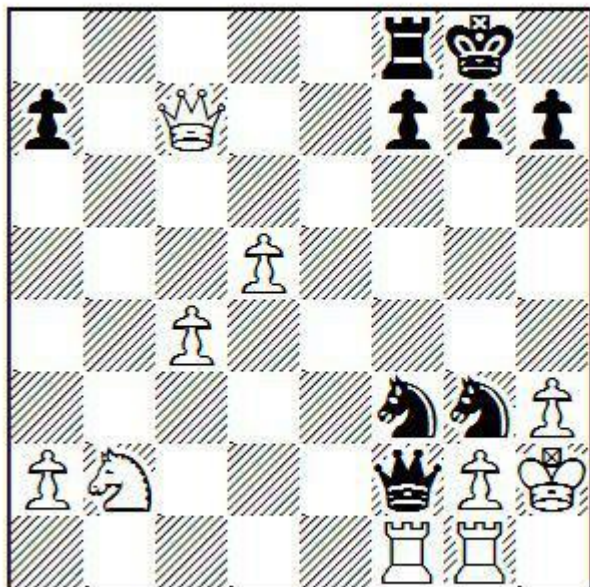
The rook's entry along the b-file was directly facilitated by White's greed on move thirteen. White is lost.

20 Nd1 Qxe2 21 Nxb2 Nh4!

Eschewing the material, Black seeks a bigger prize.

22 Rg1 Ne4 23 Qxc7 Qf2 0-1

After 24 Raf1 Ng3+ 25 Kh2 Nf3 mate,



one can't help but think that this game was the real black knights' tango!

Game 15

Mir.Lazic-N.Sulava

Saint Affrique 2002

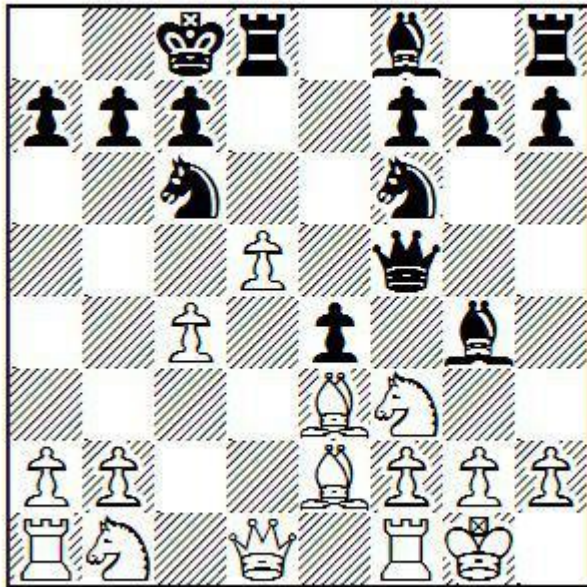
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6

This time the actual move-order was 2 ... Qxd5 3 d4 Nc6 4 Nf3 Bg4 5 Be2 0-0-0 6 c4 Qf5 7 0-0 Nf6 8 Be3.

3 d4 Bg4 4 Nf3 Qxd5 5 Be2 Nc6 6 0-0 0-0-0 7 Be3 Qf5!

A key move to remember. Black wants to evacuate the queen to the kingside before playing ... e7-e5, so as not to be embarrassed by c2-c4. The tempting 7 ... Qh5?! runs into 8 Nbd2!, followed by h2-h3, so almost by default f5 becomes the best option.

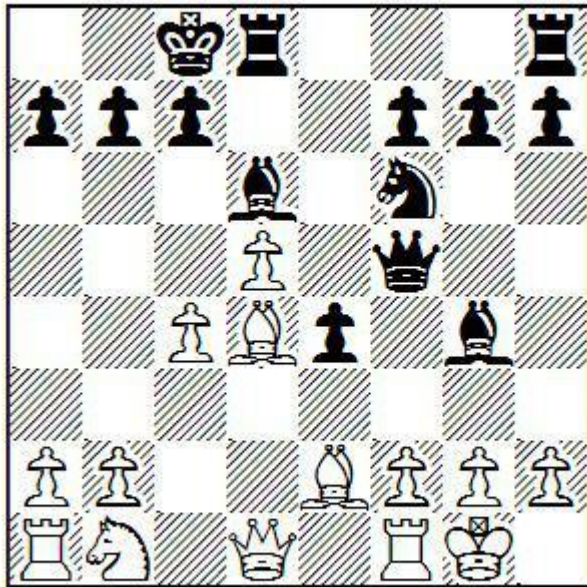
8 c4 e5 9 d5 e4



10 Nd4

10 Nfd2 Ne5 11 Nc3 is most simply met by 11 ... Bxe2 (in the spirit of the present game, 11 ... a6 12 Bd4 h5!? could also be considered) 12 Qxe2 Bd6, threatening ... Neg4 and ... Nf3+ ideas. Note that 13 c5 Nf3+! 14 gxf3 Bxh2+ is an immediate draw.

10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bd6

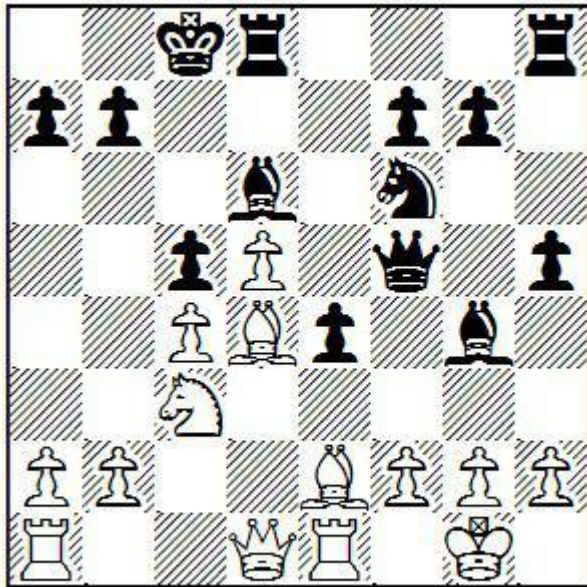


Engines are quite optimistic about White's position, but they underestimate the fragility of White's kingside in the wake of the oncoming attack from Black's pieces. A key theme to bear in mind for Black here is the idea of swapping light-squared bishops and playing ... Ng4-h2/e5, and then sacrificing the zealous steed with ... Nf3+!. The subsequent attack against White's exposed king is usually good for at least a draw, and often more once Black's rooks get into the game via g6.

12 Nc3

Other moves:

- a) 12 h3? Bxh3! is an immediate disaster for White.
- b) 12 Bxg4? Nxg4 13 h3 runs into 13 ... Nh2! 14 Re1 Nf3+! and White was busted in *kifa13* (2282)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.
- c) 12 Bxf6 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Qxf6 (13 ... gxf6!? is also fine for Black; see the theory section for more details) 14 Nc3 Qe5 15 g3 f5 offers equal chances.
- d) 12 Re1!? is the "Grandmasters' choice", and hence the latest fashion: 12 ... h5! (an important novelty, courtesy of IM Guy West) 13 Nc3 c5!! and it seems to me, expanding on Guy's original home analysis, that White should already start thinking about how to equalize.



For example, 14 Bxf6 gxf6! 15 g3 Be5! 16 Qc2 Bd4! gives Black a strong attack; while 14 Be3 allows the typical attacking motif 14 ... Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Ng4! 16 h3 Ne5 with the powerful threat of sacrificing the knight on f3.

Instead, 14 dxc6 is critical, initiating a forced sequence from which neither side should dare to deviate: 14 ... bxc6 15 Qa4! Bxh2+! 16 Kxh2 Rxd4 17 Qxa7 Qxf2! and now all the roads of best play lead to a draw. Further details can be found in the theory section, but so long as Black doesn't move her king to the d-file when checked, and so long as White doesn't dally too much over giving perpetual check, the game should end safely for both players.

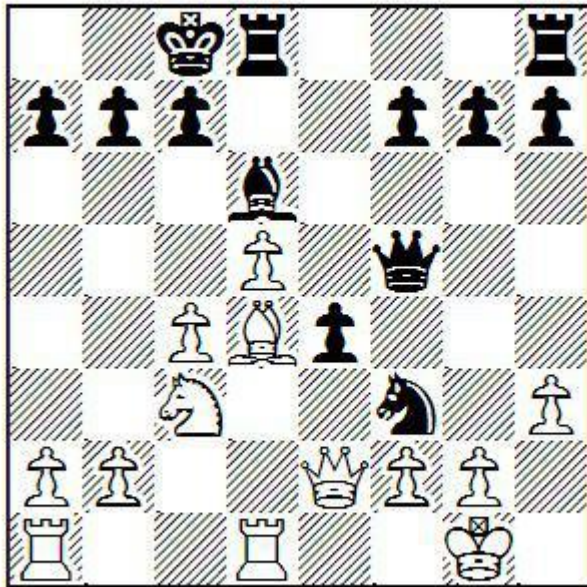
12 ... Bxe2 13 Qxe2

13 Nxe2!? was certainly safer. After 13 ... Rhe8 14 h3 Kb8 15 b4 Be5!, the position looks roughly balanced.

13 ... Ng4! 14 h3

Or 14 g3 Rhe8 with chances for both sides.

14 ... Nh2! 15 Rfd1 Nf3+!!



A standard theme in this variation. The knight is immune, but does Black have more than a perpetual check?

16 Kf1

Not 16 gxf3?? exf3 17 Qf1 Qf4 and wins; while 16 Kh1?? Nxd4! 17 Rxd4 Qe5 hits the white rook as well as threatening a deadly checkmate on h2.

16 ... Rhe8!?

That's what we like to see! Black turns down the draw to provoke White into continuing the game. 16 ... Nh2+ 17 Kg1 Nf3+ is a quick point-split. But 16 ... Nxd4!? 17 Rxd4 Qe5 was worth considering. Black sacrifices a pawn in order to infiltrate on h2 with dangerous compensation, though White's defences should be able to hold with precision.

17 Be3! Nh2+ 18 Ke1!?

White takes the bait. Now we have a real fight on our hands. 18 Kg1 was safe, when Black really doesn't have anything better than to acquiesce to the draw.

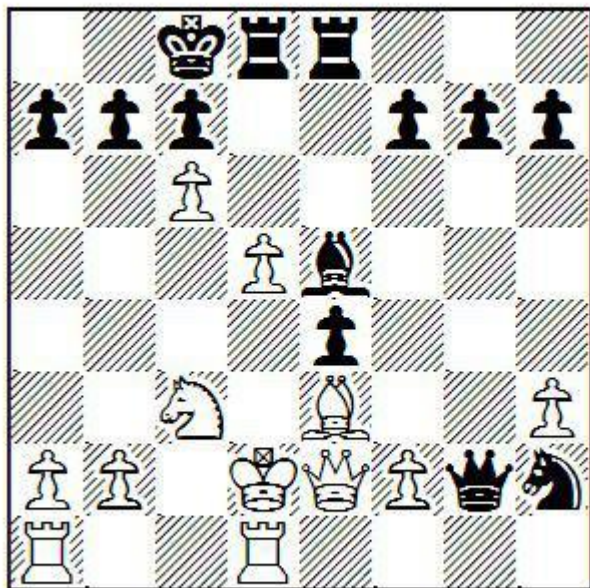
18 ... Qg6 19 Kd2?

19 c5! was the correct way forward, when 19 ... Qxg2 20 Kd2 would transpose to the game.

19 ... Qxg2?

Returning the favour. First 19 ... f5!, introducing the possibility of ... f5-f4, and if 20 Bxa7 only then 20 ... Qxg2! is good for Black.

20 c5! Be5 21 c6



21 ... Qg6

Instead, 21 ... a6!? would at least have forced White to find some 'only moves' in order to claim the point: 22 Kc2! Qxh3! introduces the possibility of ... Ng4 to eliminate the dangerous e3-bishop. Now the win is still within White's grasp, but only with a long and narrow forcing variation. Take a deep breath: 23 Qc4! Ng4 24 cxb7+ Kxb7 25 Qc6+ Kb8 26 Bc5! Qh6 27 d6!! cxd6 28 Qb6+ Kc8 29 Nb5! axb5 30 Qc6+ Kb8 31 Qxb5+ Kc8 32 Bb6! Re7! 33 Rac1! d5 34 Kb1+ Rc7 35 Qa6+ Kd7 36 Rxd5+ Ke7 37 Rxe5+ Nxe5 38 Rxc7+ Nd7 39 Ra7! and wins. Phew!

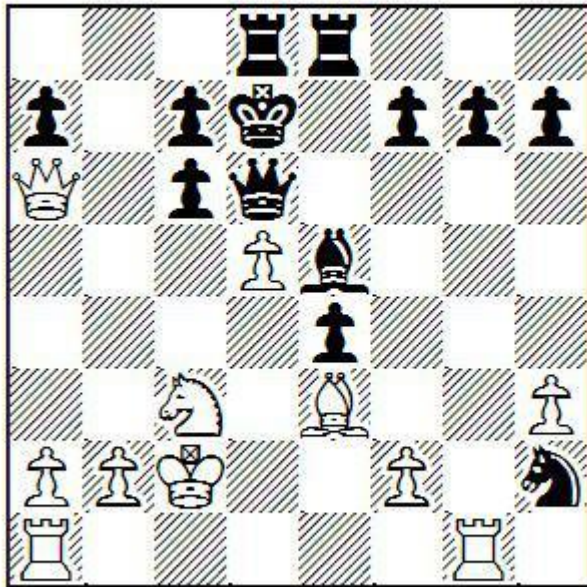
22 Kc2!

White's king has escaped, and suddenly the black king is the one in imminent danger.

22 ... bxc6?!

22 ... a6 was objectively best, although after 23 Na4!, White has a decisive advantage.

23 Qa6+ Kd7 24 Rg1! Qd6



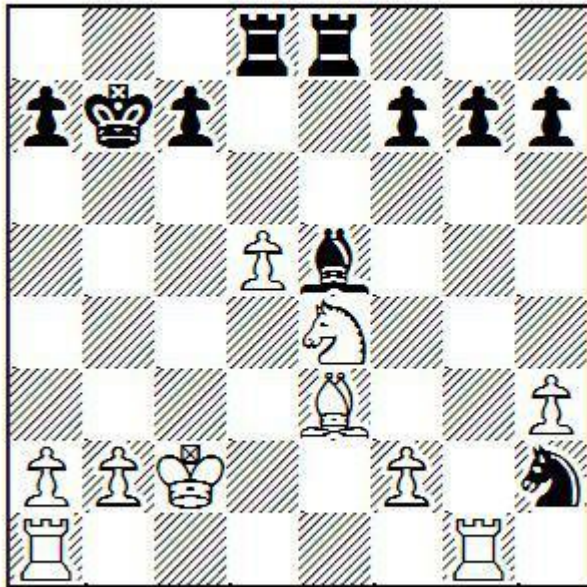
25 Nxe4

Not yet spoiling anything, even if 25 Rad1! was crushing.

25 ... Qb4! 26 Qxc6+??

But this obvious capture does throw away the win, and worse is yet to come. 26 Nc5+! Ke7 27 Nd3! was the sequence White needed to find in order to reel in the point.

26 ... Kc8 27 Qa6+ Qb7! 28 Qxb7+ Kxb7



It could be said that both kings were fortunate to escape! We have now reached a fairly balanced endgame. White's pawn islands are extremely weak, but Black's knight is a few moves from re-entering the game, so White should have time to organize counterplay.

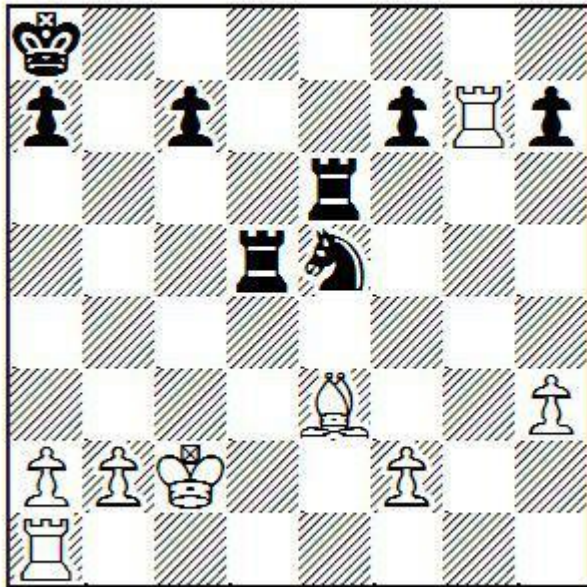
29 Nc5+ Ka8 30 Nd3?!

Right manoeuvre, wrong timing! 30 Rad1 was called for, when 30 ... Nf3?! allows 31 Rg4!, intending a menacing rook lift to the queenside.

30 ... Nf3

Stronger was 30 ... Bf6! 31 Rg3 h5! and Black manages to extricate the knight, keeping an advantage.

31 Rg4 Rxd5?! 32 Nxe5 Nxe5 33 Rxg7 Re6



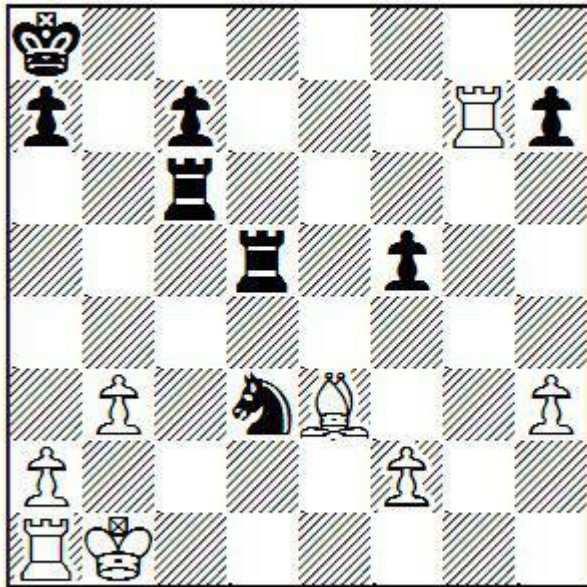
34 b3??

A tragic blunder in the approach to the time control, allowing the few remaining black forces to weave an unexpected mating net. White should have played 34 Rag1!, giving the king an escape route, with a slight advantage on account of the typically better coordination of the bishop with the rooks.

34 ... Rc6+! 35 Kb2

Or 35 Kb1 Rd1+ 36 Kb2 Nd3+ 37 Ka3 Ra6 mate.

35 ... Nd3+ 36 Kb1 f5!!



The bishop, the last bastion of the white king's defences, suddenly finds itself stretched beyond its limits.

37 Rg1

Or 37 f4 Nb4! 38 Rg1 (38 Kb2 Rc2+ 39 Ka3 Nc6! wins) 38 ... Rd3 39 Bc1 Nc2 and White must part with a fatal amount of material.

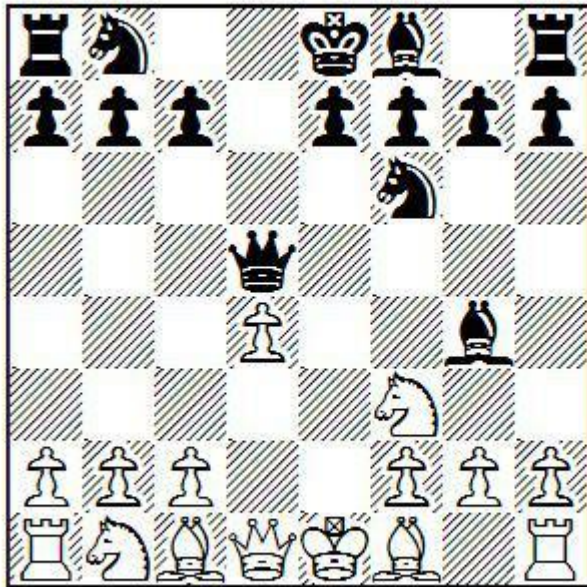
37 ... f4 38 Bd2 Rdc5 0-1

White resigned, as ... Rc2 will be terminal.

An entertaining battle in which both players should be commended for their tremendous fighting spirit.

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 d4 Bg4 4 Nf3 Qxd5



White usually replies with 5 Be2 here, but we'll look at some minor alternatives first:

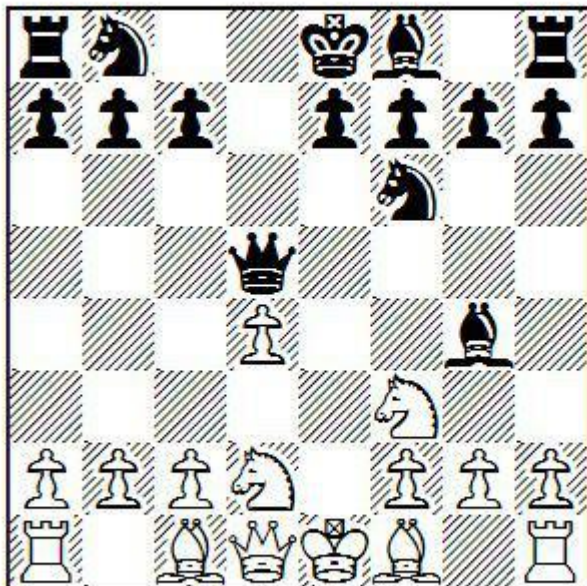
A: 5 Nbd2

B: 5 c4!?

C: 5 Nc3

D: 5 Be2

A: 5 Nbd2



Very rare, though not necessarily worse than the main lines. White overprotects f3 and shields her queen from a future pin along the d-file.

5 ... Nc6 6 c3!

Instead:

a) 6 c4?! Qa5! presents White with major difficulties over her d4-pawn, and 7 d5 Nd4! doesn't ease the congestion. Black is better.

b) 6 Bc4 leads to a roughly level endgame: 6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxd5 Bxd1 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 Kxd1 e6 10 Nb3 Bd6 with equality.

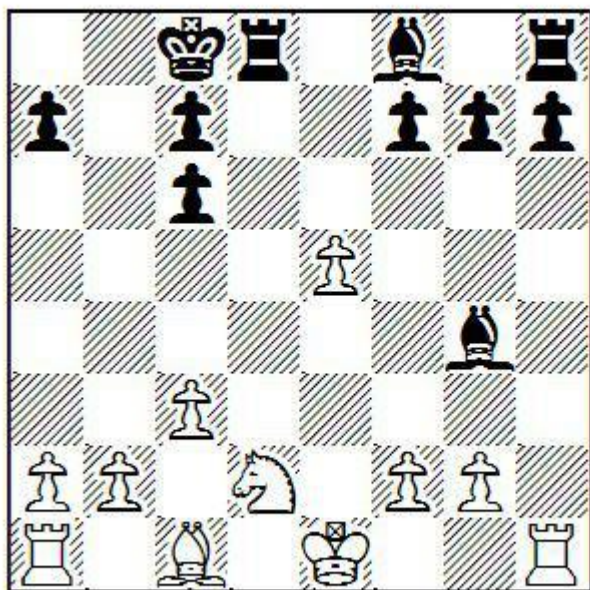
6 ... e5

6 ... 0-0-0 7 Bc4 Qd7 is equal.

7 Bc4 Bxf3

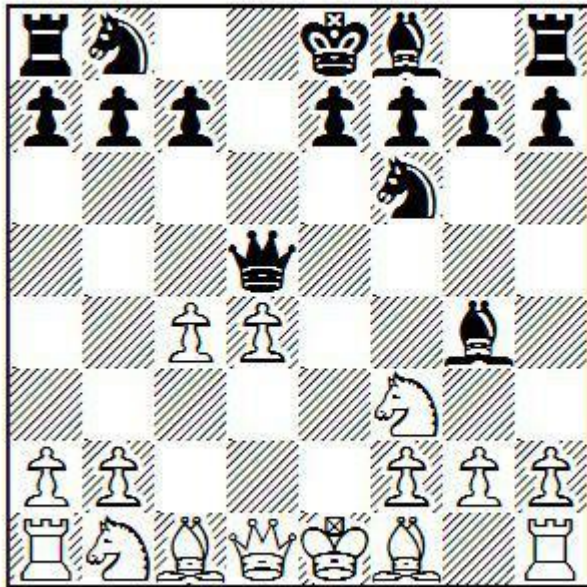
A thematic sequence.

8 Bxd5 Bxd1 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 dxe5 Ng4 11 h3 0-0-0 12 hxg4 Bxg4



Although she has some weaknesses on the queenside, with two bishops and superior development, Black is slightly better.

B: 5 c4!?



Another rare alternative that deserves more attention. White is prepared to accept a worse pawn structure in exchange for the two bishops and swift activation of her pieces.

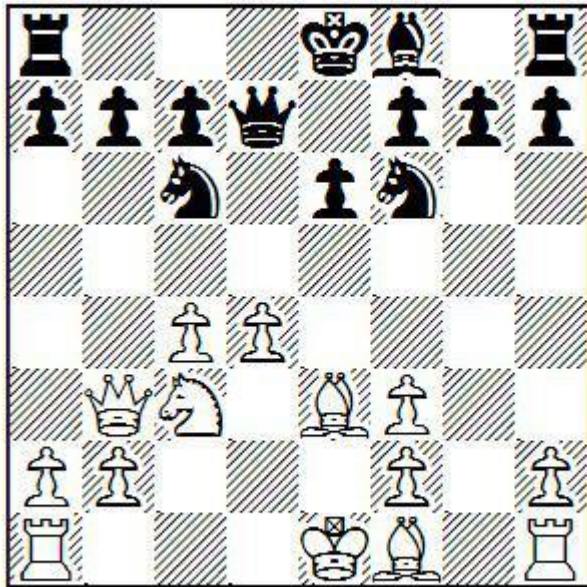
5 ... Bxf3 6 gxf3 Qd7

6 ... Qh5!? might be better: 7 Qb3!? (7 Bf4 Nc6! already favours Black) 7 ... Nbd7 8 Bg2 (8 Qxb7?! Rb8 9 Qxc7 e5! gives Black excellent compensation) 8 ... 0-0-0 9 0-0 e6 with chances for both sides.

7 Nc3 e6 8 Be3

Or 8 Bh3!? Na6 9 d5 0-0-0 10 0-0 Kb8 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Qxd7 Nxd7! 13 Bxe6 Ne5 with good compensation.

8 ... Nc6 9 Qb3



9 ... Nxd4!

9 ... Na5?! is weaker but worked out well in one of my games: 10 Qc2 0-0-0 11 0-0-0 Kb8 12 d5 (12 Kb1! is better) 12 ... exd5 13 cxd5 Bb4! 14 a3? Bxc3 15 Qxc3 Qa4! with a dangerous attack, A.Merry-D.Smerdon, Daventry (rapid) 2013.

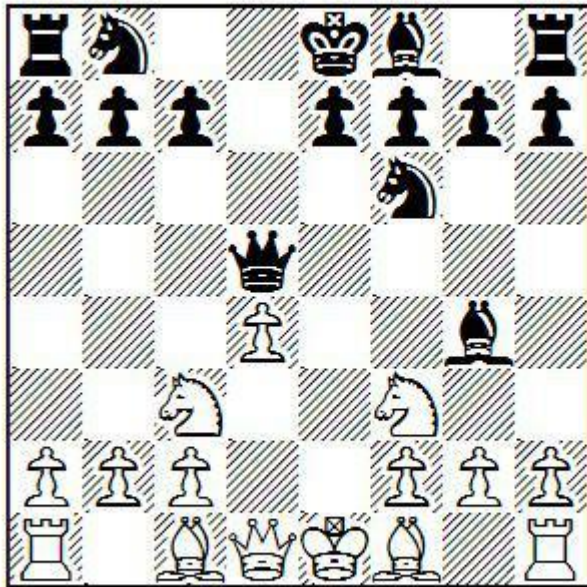
10 Qxb7

10 Bxd4? Qxd4 11 Qxb7 Rd8 12 Rd1 Qb6 gives Black a clear advantage.

10 ... Nc2+ 11 Ke2 Qc8! 12 Qxc8+ Rxc8 13 Rd1 Nxe3 14 fxe3 Rb8

With equality.

C: 5 Nc3



Natural, but after this move White will have to play precisely not to fall worse.

5 ... Qh5!

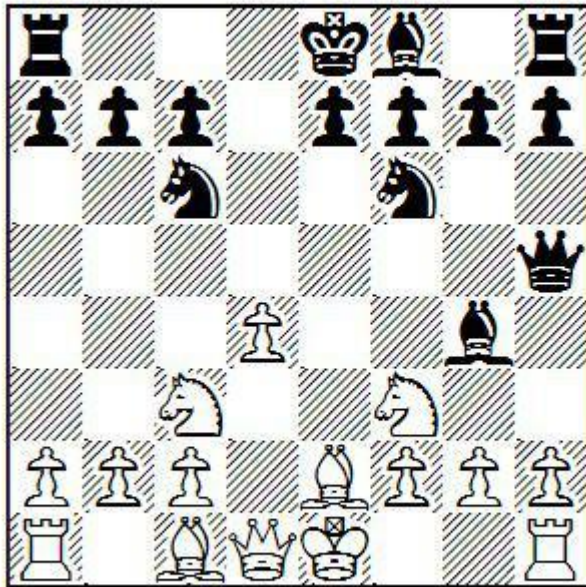
An important example of when Black should choose this square for the queen. White's tempo spent on an early Nc3 means that she is, crucially, one move slower to castle. Black can build up powerful pressure on d4 before White has time to break the pin on the f3-knight.

Alternatively, 5 ... Bxf3!? is very interesting, though ultimately not as good as the text. After the forcing sequence 6 Nxd5 Bxd1 7 Nxc7+ Kd7 8 Nxa8 Bxc2, Black has promising compensation for the exchange. For example, 9 Bf4 Nc6 10 Nc7 e6 11 Nb5 Bb4+ 12 Bd2 Bxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Bg6 with almost-sufficient compensation; the d4-pawn will soon fall.

6 Be2

6 Bf4 Nc6! 7 Bxc7 e6 gives Black excellent compensation for the pawn, and 8 Be2 Bb4 9 Qd3 Rc8 was already slightly better for Black in M.J.Blake-Ar.Reed, correspondence 2011.

6 ... Nc6



Now:

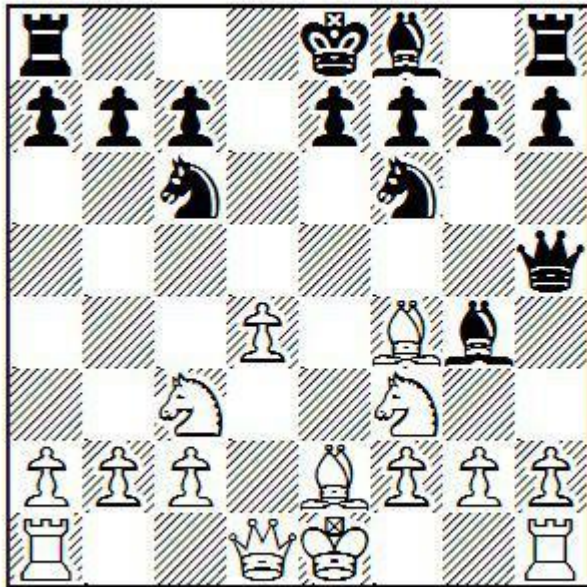
C1: 7 Bf4

C2: 7 Be3

C3: 7 0-0

C4: 7 h3

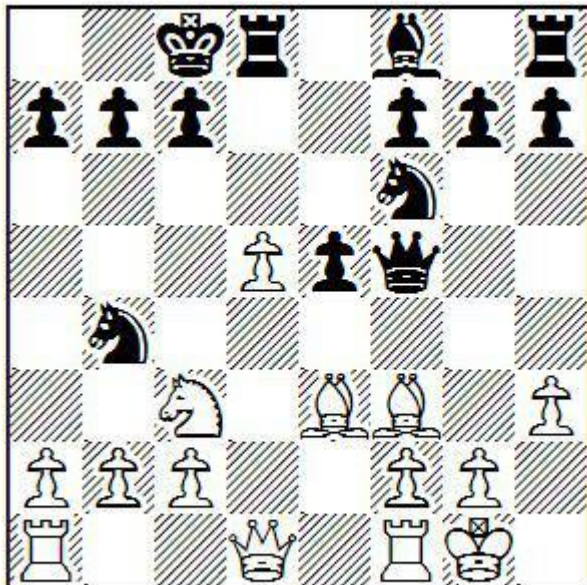
C1: 7 Bf4



7 ... 0-0-0 8 0-0

Both 8 Qd2 Qf5! and 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Qf5! give Black the advantage, as d4 is critically weak; for example, 10 Bxc6 (or 10 Be3 Nxd4! 11 Bxd4 e5) 10 ... Qxf4 11 Ne2 Qd6 12 Bf3 e5! and Black is better.

8 ... Qf5 9 Be3 e5! 10 d5 Nb4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Bxf3

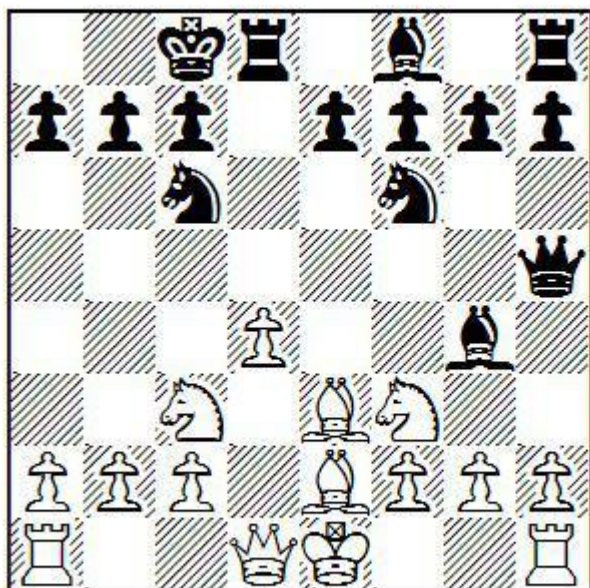


I.Dordevic-D.Smerdon, Rotorua Zonal 2011, and now 12 ... Nxc2! is slightly better for Black.

C2: 7 Be3

A typical inaccuracy, which can occur via different move-orders. White's natural development scheme has actually left her with grave difficulties across the multiple pins.

7 ... 0-0-0



It is usually at this point that opponents start to realize that White's centre is far less stable than it first appears: ... e7-e5 cannot be stopped. It is easy to see how Black has managed to score so many quick wins in this variation; simple, natural developing moves have left White in a most uncomfortable situation.

Here we have a further branch. Try not to be dismayed by the seemingly dazzling number of subvariations; the lines weave in and out of each other, so you don't have to learn as much as it seems.

C21: 8 Qd2?

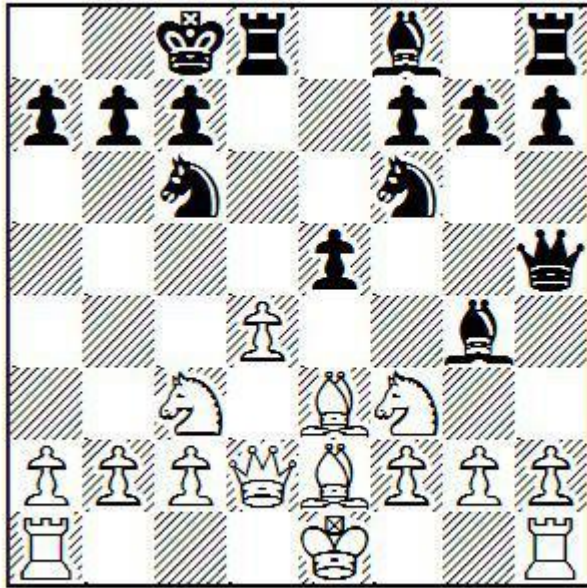
C22: 8 Qc1?!

C23: 8 0-0

C24: 8 a3

C25: 8 h3!

C21: 8 Qd2? e5!



9 d5

Or 9 0-0-0 exd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc5! and Black wins; for example, 12 h3 Bxe2 13 Nxe2 Bxd4 14 Nxd4 c5 15 Qc3 Qg5+! 16 Kb1 Ne4! etc.

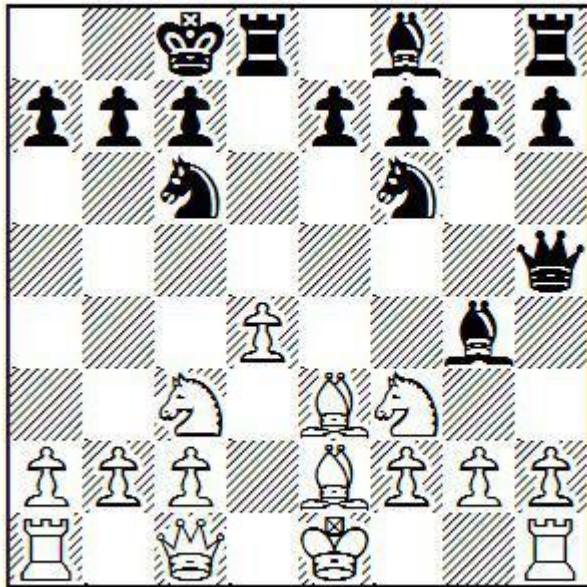
9 ... Bb4!

White is already lost.

10 dxc6 Rxd2 11 cxb7+ Kxb7 12 Bxd2 e4

White can resign, Wi.Jordan-D.Smerdon, Melbourne 2004.

C22: 8 Qc1?!



An attempt by White's queen to flee the perils of the pin on the d-file.

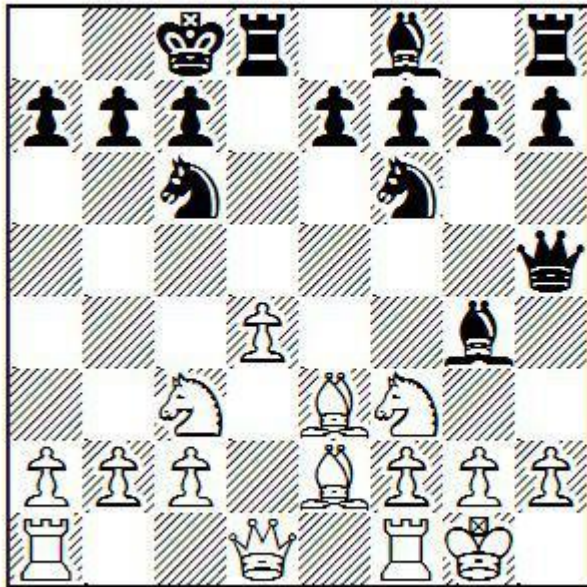
8 ... e5! 9 dxe5 Nxe5 10 Nxe5

Not 10 Nd4?, R.Nevanlinna-S.Krivoshey, Internet (blitz) 2002, since 10 ... Bc5! wins for Black.

10 ... Bxe2 11 Nxe2 Qxe5 12 0-0 Bd6 13 g3 Ng4!

Black is clearly better.

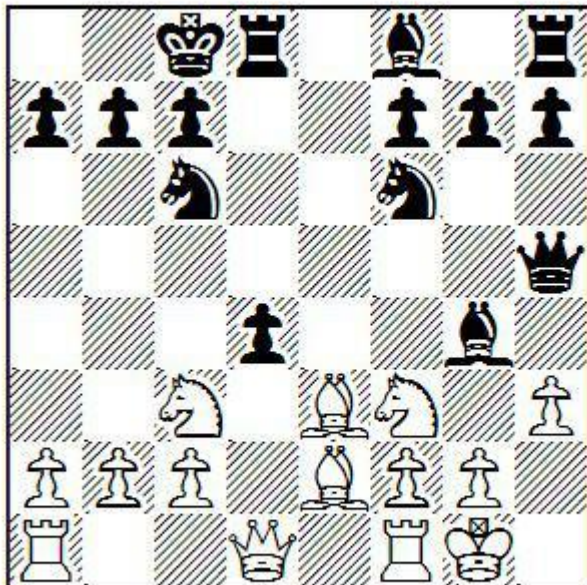
C23: 8 0-0



8 ... e5 9 h3

9 d5 is met by 9 ... e4! with a clear advantage to Black; for example, 10 Ng5 Rxd5! 11 Nxd5 Bxe2 12 Qd2 Bd6 with an absolute rout despite the huge rating imbalance (2129 vs. 1688) in A.Milnes-T.Seymour, British League 2003.

9 ... exd4!



A common position that can again occur via multiple move-orders. White faces a narrow path just to escape with a worse position:

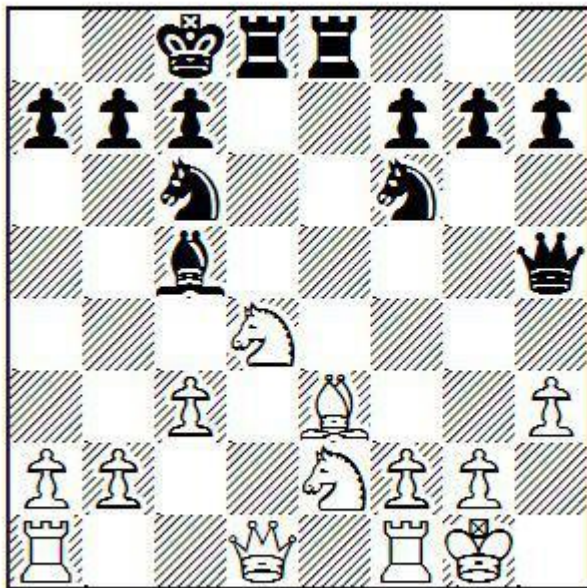
10 Nxd4!

Other captures are fatal:

a) 10 Bxd4?? Nxd4 11 Nxd4 Bxe2 12 Ncxe2 c5 wins a piece.

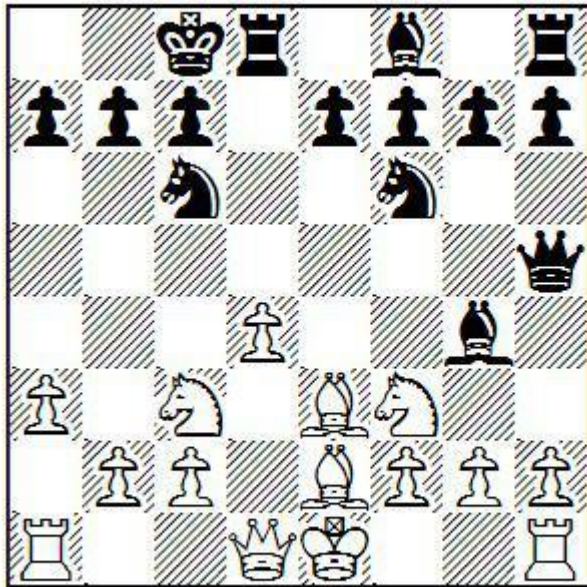
b) 10 hxg4? has occurred surprisingly often, considering that 10 ... Nxg4 is completely winning for Black: 11 Bf4 (here 11 Nh4 f5! is an important theme to remember) 11 ... dxc3 12 Qc1 Re8 13 Bd3 Re6 with a complete demolition; ... Bd6 will be followed by ... Rh6.

10 ... Bxe2 11 Ncxe2 Bc5 12 c3 Rhe8



Black has a comfortable advantage. For example, 13 Qb3 Nxd4 14 cxd4 Bb6 15 Nf4 Qf5 16 Qxf7 Bxd4 17 Rad1 Rd7 18 Qb3 Bxe3 19 fxe3 Rxd1 20 Rxd1 Qe5 with a decisive endgame advantage that was soon converted in J.Valencia Ciordia-P.Corbat, correspondence 2005.

C24: 8 a3



White prevents ... Bb4.

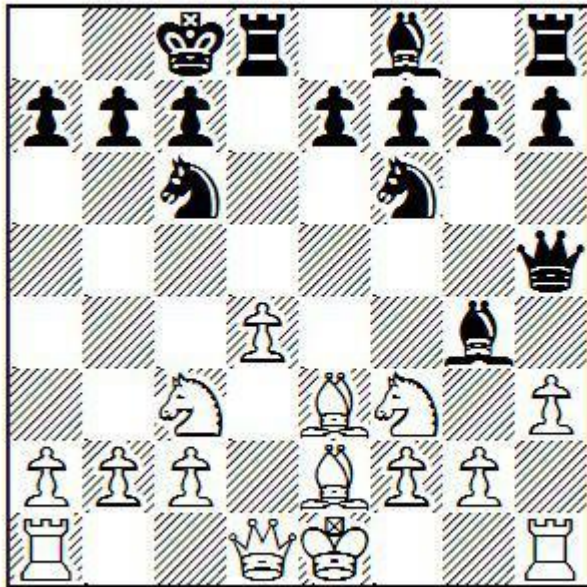
8 ... Nxd4!

An easy solution, as yet unplayed.

9 Bxd4 c5 10 Nb5 cxd4 11 Nxa7+ Kb8 12 Nb5 Bxf3 13 gxf3 Qe5!

Black has a slight advantage.

C25: 8 h3!



This position can also arise via multiple move-orders; from our sequence, it is the only choice for White that can aspire to equality!

8 ... e5

The standard treatment, and just in time!

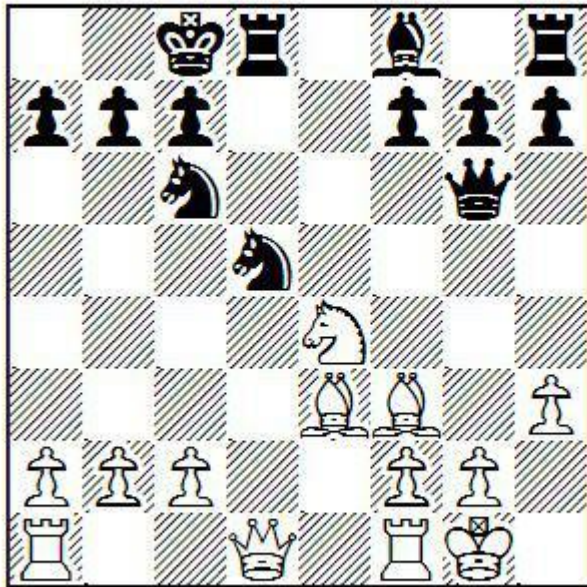
9 d5

Not 9 Qd2? exd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bxe2 12 Nxe2 Bc5 13 c3 Bxd4 14 cxd4 Rhe8 with a decisive advantage.

9 ... Bxf3

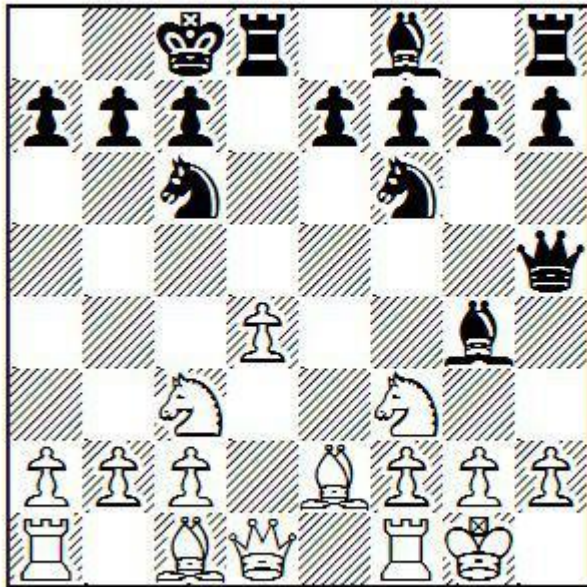
Here 9 ... e4? is a mistake on account of 10 Ng5!. But 9 ... Bb4!? is promising, intending a dangerous piece sacrifice: 10 0-0 Bxh3 11 gxh3 Bxc3! 12 bxc3 Rxd5 13 Nd2 Qxh3 14 Bf3 e4 15 Bg2 Qh4, when Black has three pawns and a strong attack for the piece.

10 Bxf3 Qg6 11 0-0 e4 12 Nxe4 Nxd5



Black has the initiative, but White has enough play to hold the balance. The game might continue 13 Qe2 Re8 14 Nd6+! (the only way to avoid falling into a much inferior position) 14 ... Qxd6 15 Rfd1 Re5 16 c4 Nxe3! 17 Rxd6 Nf5 18 Rd8+! Kxd8 19 Qd3+ Kc8 20 Bxc6 bxc6 21 f4! and a draw should result after 21 ... Ra5 22 Qc3 Ra4 23 Qc2 Ra5.

C3: 7 0-0 0-0-0



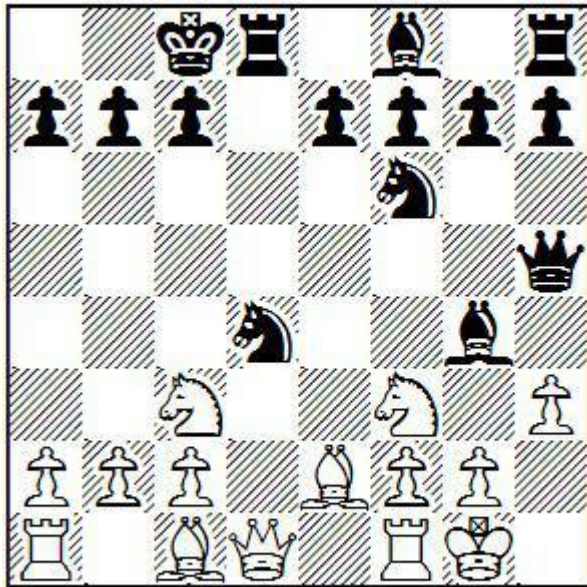
8 h3

Alternatively:

a) 8 Be3 e5 transposes to line C23 above, which favours Black.

b) 8 Qe1!? is a bizarre computer-inspired novelty that would never have crossed my mind. Having said that, there is a certain degree of logic in removing the queen from two pins at once. You will probably never encounter this move in your life, so it is enough to know that 8 ... e6 9 h3 Bxh3! gives Black a very strong attack.

8 ... Nxd4!



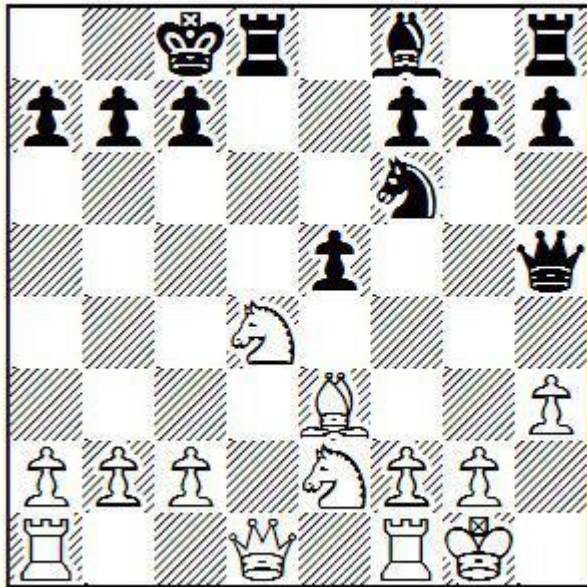
9 Nxd4

Not 9 hxg4?? Nxg4 10 Nh4 Nxe2+ and Black wins.

9 ... Bxe2 10 Ncxe2

After 10 Qxe2 Rxd4 11 Qxh5 Nxh5 12 Nb5 Ra4!, White's compensation is not sufficient for the pawn in this endgame; Black is clearly better.

10 ... e5 11 Be3

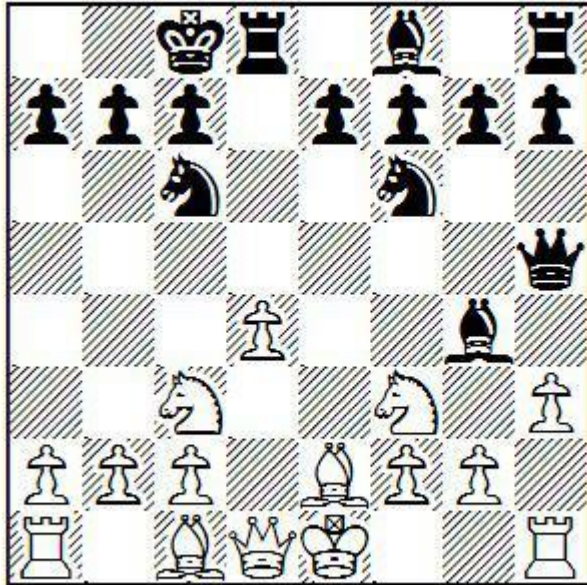


11 ... Qg6!?

Here 11 ... exd4 12 Nxd4 Qe5 is equal, but the text is a smart improvement, particularly if Black would like to retain winning chances.

In the one game to feature 11 ... Qg6 to date, White immediately went wrong: 12 Qd3?! Qxd3 13 cxd3 exd4 14 Bxd4 Nd5! and Black was clearly better, Fi.Svoboda-K.Koziol, Novy Bor 2013. However, Black's position is preferable in any case: 12 c3 exd4 13 cxd4 Bd6 with a slight advantage.

C4: 7 h3 0-0-0



The game will most likely now transpose into variations already considered. For instance, 8 Bf4, 8 Be3 and 8 0-0 transpose into lines C1, C25 and C3, respectively.

White has one, weak, independent try:

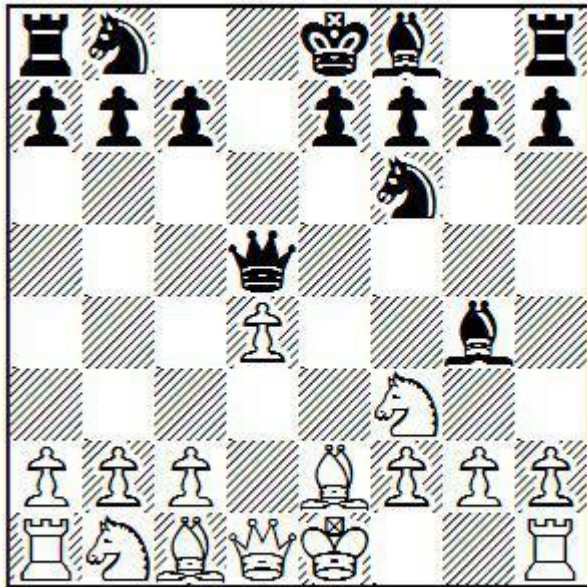
8 Rg1?! Nxd4! 9 Nxd4 Bxe2 10 Qxe2

10 Ncxe2 e5 wins a piece.

10 ... Rxd4 11 Qxh5 Nxd5 12 Be3 Rd7

Black is simply a pawn up, Sel.Kaya-Ah.Hamad, Izmir 2006.

D: 5 Be₂



5 ... Nc6

We now have a further branch. Again, don't be disheartened by the number of alternatives; transpositions are likely, so you have already seen most of the relevant theory already. For instance, 6 Nc3 Qh5 transposes to line C above.

D1: 6 c3

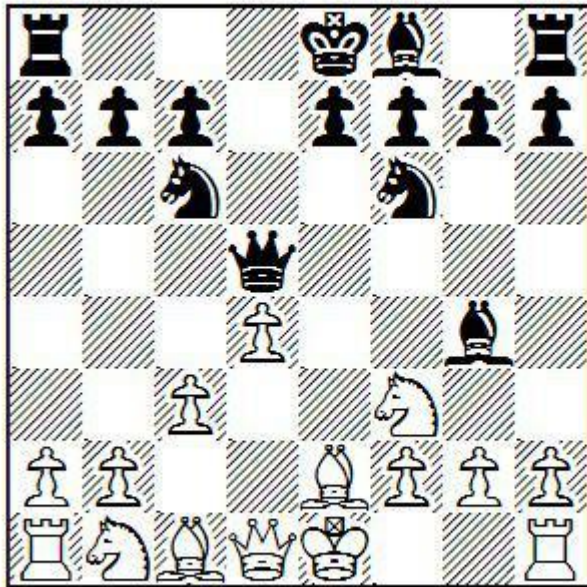
D2: 6 h3

D3: 6 Be3

D4: 6 0-0

D5: 6 c4

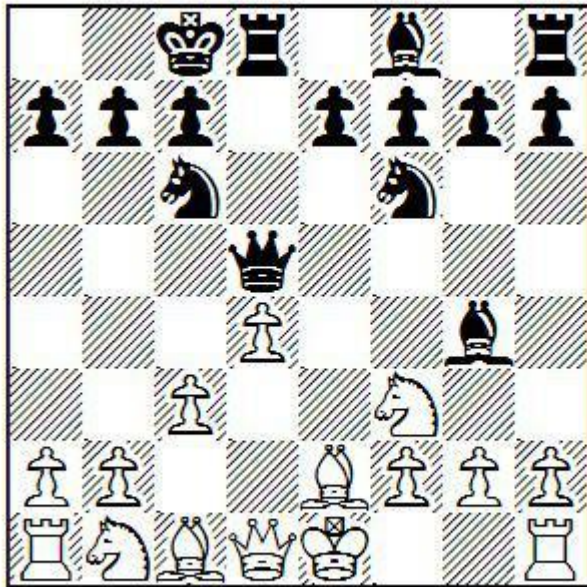
D1: 6 c3



The least popular of White's sixth-move alternatives, although this conservative move, which bolsters the weak point on d4, isn't so bad.

6 ... 0-0-0

It seems bizarre that 6 ... e5 has never been played before, at least according to my database. It is quite respectable, but gives White fewer opportunities to go wrong: 7 h3 (7 dxe5 Bxf3 8 Qxd5 Bxd5 9 exf6 gxf6 10 0-0 0-0-0 is also equal; whereas 7 c4?! Qa5+ 8 Bd2 Bb4 9 d5 Bxf3! 10 Bxf3 Nd4 11 Nc3 Qa6 12 Be2 c6 is slightly better for Black) 7 ... Bxf3 8 Bxf3 e4 (8 ... Qd7 transposes to line D2) 9 Be2 Bd6 10 0-0 0-0 with equal chances.



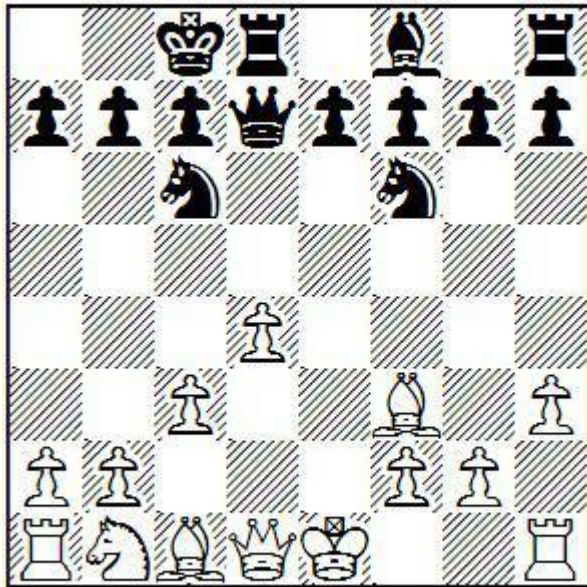
This position may look harmless, but don't be fooled; the threat of ... e7-e5 is particularly venomous. I have won several blitz miniatures from here.

7 h3!

7 Qb3? is a common mistake: 7 ... Qh5! (7 ... e5 is also good for Black, and 8 dxe5 Nxe5 9 Qxd5 Rxd5 10 Nxe5?? Rxe5 led to a quick win in *DarkSun* (2200)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012) 8 0-0 e5! is clearly better for Black, because 9 dxe5? Nxe5 10 Nbd2 Rxd2!! wins immediately, *Lagano* (2350)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014.

7 Qa4? is hardly any better: 7 ... e5! 8 dxe5 Nxe5 9 Nbd2 (or 9 Qxa7 Bxf3 etc) 9 ... Nd3+! 10 Bxd3 Qxd3 with a decisive attack, *totus* (2426)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

7 ... Bxf3 8 Bxf3 Qd7



We have arrived at a position more commonly reached from the move-order 6 h3 Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Qd7 8 c3 0-0-0. White's set-up is not to be underestimated; her bishop on f3 points menacingly towards the black king, and she is ready either to increase the pressure with Qb3 or launch a quick queenside pawn storm. On the flipside, Black is still slightly ahead in development, and can continue to pressure the white centre with gain of time.

9 Qb3

Alternatively:

a) 9 Qa4 Nd5! 10 0-0 Kb8 11 c4 Nb6 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Qa6 Qxd4 gave White some compensation for the pawn, but no more than that, in Ma.Lyell-N.Povah, British League 2005.

b) 9 0-0 allows 9 ... e5!, although 10 Qb3 is still dangerous: 10 ... exd4 (10 ... e4!? 11 Be2 Nd5 worked out well for Black after 12 Qc2?! f5! in R.M.Webb-N.Povah, British League 2004, but 12 Nd2, intending Nc4, would have left White with the advantage) 11 cxd4 Qxd4 (the funny-looking 11 ... Qe6!? can be considered; after 12 Qxe6+ fxe6 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Be3 Bb4!, White has a slight advantage, but I doubt it would be enough to win in view of the weakness of d4) 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Be3 Qb4 14 Qxf7 Nd5! with a complicated game in which Black's chances are marginally inferior.

The knight on d5 is the jewel in her crown, while White is still lagging behind in development; on the other hand, Black's pawn structure is clearly worse.

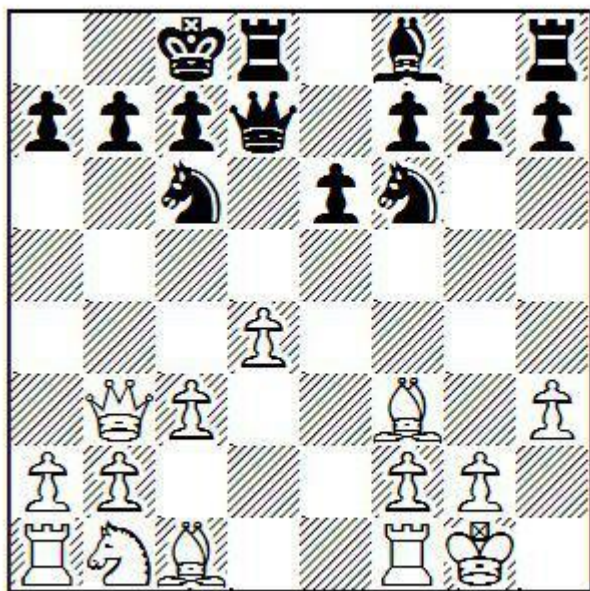
9 ... e6!

In this particular variation, with White's bishop pointing ominously down the long diagonal and her colleague itching to join in, it is better for Black to keep the centre closed for now:

a) 9 ... e5?! 10 dxe5 Re8 11 0-0 Rxe5 12 Nd2 favours White.

b) 9 ... Nd5 10 0-0 e5?! 11 Rd1 exd4 12 cxd4 gave White a clear advantage in B.Adhiban-Kh.Akshat, Sharjah 2014. Black cannot maintain a hold over d5, and White's dangerous attacking prospects far outweigh any positional weakness of the isolated pawn.

10 0-0



10 ... Rg8

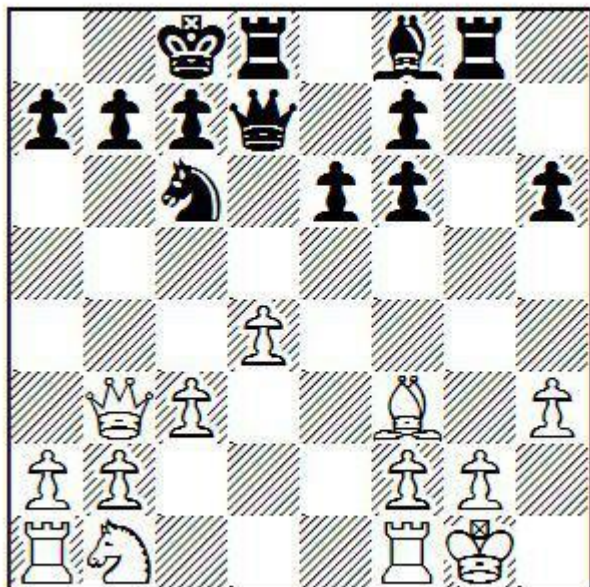
Black has always opted for this preparatory move in practice, but speeding up the process by the novelty 10 ... Nd5!? 11 Nd2 Be7 is worthy of consideration. After 12 Nc4 h5 13 a4 g5!, Black's rook is better suited on h8 to assist in the attack.

11 Bg5

Again, this has been White's choice in every game, though after this move, Black can successfully neutralize the pressure.

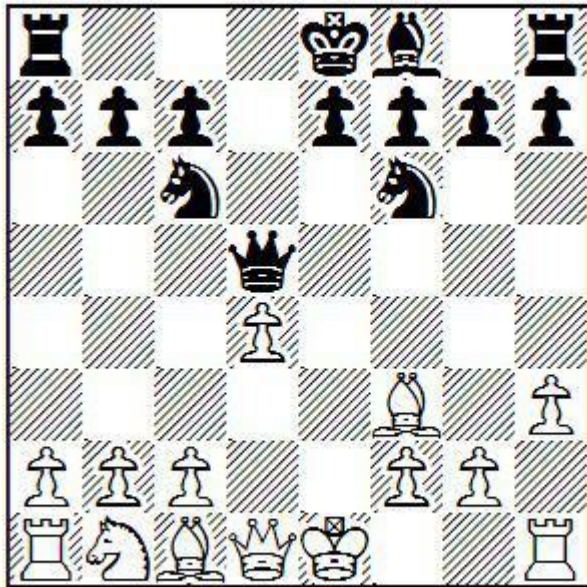
The unplayed 11 Nd2!? g5 12 Nc4 is more testing. White threatens Ne5, so 12 ... Nd5 is again called for. Then 13 a4 f5 leads to a classic 'opposite-wings' attacking race where White's chances look more promising, which suggests that 10 ... Nd5 is a more accurate choice for Black.

11 ... h6 12 Bxf6 gxf6



From this position play has continued 13 Nd2 (or 13 Kh1 Na5! with chances for both sides, S.Kasparov-S.Krivoshey, Rovno 2000) 13 ... e5 14 d5? (14 Kh1 is much safer, with a sharp tactical battle) 14 ... Na5 15 Qd1 Qxh3 (15 ... f5! is even stronger) 16 g3?? (White had to play 16 b4, when 16 ... h5! 17 bxa5 f5 gives Black a dangerous attack for the piece) 16 ... Rxg3+ 0-1 P.Cooksey-N.Povah, British League 1999, since 17 fxg3 Qxg3+ 18 Bg2 Bc5+ wins.

D2: 6 h3 Bxf3 7 Bxf3



This line will usually transpose to the previous one (D1), but there are some possible deviations.

7 ... Qd7

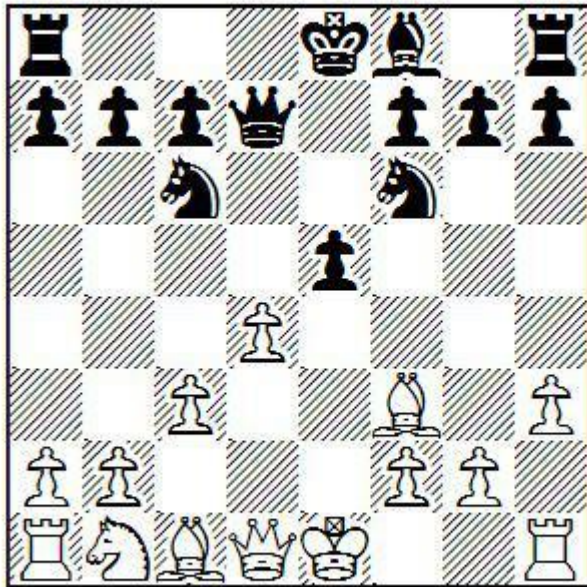
7 ... Qe6+ 8 Be3 Nd5 9 Qe2 (9 Qd3? Ndb4! 10 Qe2 Nxd4 led to a quick black win in M.Rujevic-D.Smerdon, Australian Championship, Melbourne 2002) 9 ... Nxe3 10 fxe3 Qd7 11 Nc3 e6 12 0-0-0 is playable for Black, if slightly better for White, La.Ootes-D.Reinderman, Bussum 2013.

8 c3

Here 8 0-0! looks to be an important nuance, as suggested by IM Guy West. Black has a choice between 8 ... 0-0-0 9 c3, transposing to 9 0-0 in line D1, or an endgame after the sequence 8 ... Nxd4 9 Bxb7 Rd8 (threatening ... Qb5) 10 Ba6! e6 11 c3! Nf5 12 Qxd7+ Nxd7. White must be slightly better with the bishop pair, though her queenside majority looks like more of a weakness than a strength in the long term, and Black's knights are very active. Personally, I feel that Black shouldn't have too many problems in this ending, but it may not be to everyone's taste.

8 ... e5

8 ... 0-0-0 is a direct transposition to line D1.



9 0-0

Instead:

a) 9 Qb3 Na5! 10 Qc2 exd4 11 cxd4 Be7 is equal.

b) 9 dxe5 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 0-0-0+ 11 Kc2 Nxe5 12 Be2 Bc5 is at least equal, A.Gonzalez Perez-D.Smerdon, Rianxo (rapid) 2014.

c) 9 d5 Ne7 10 c4 should be met by the novelty 10 ... Nf5! (rather than 10 ... e4 11 Be2 Nf5 12 g4! which is good for White, A.Ashton-D.Smerdon, Isle of Man 2007; or 10 ... Ng6, as analysed in Game 14, Nabaty-Chatalbashev) 11 0-0 Bc5 12 Re1 0-0! with equal chances. Note that 13 Rxe5? is a serious mistake, as 13 ... Rfe8 14 Rxe8+ Rxe8 gives Black a huge attack.

9 ... exd4

Otherwise 9 ... 0-0-0 reaches 9 0-0 e5 in line D1 again.

10 Re1+

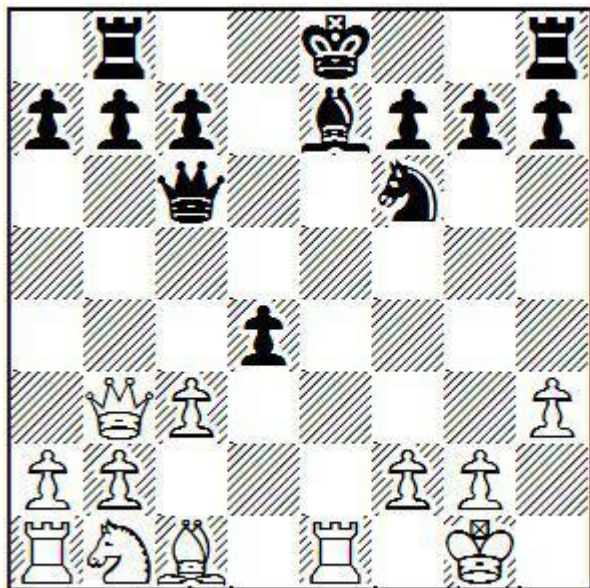
White might aim for line D1 herself with 10 Qb3!, when 10 ... 0-0-0 is the transposition. Alternatively, Black can avoid that with 10 ... Rb8, after which 11 Re1+ Be7 returns to the main line below, while 11 Bf4 Be7 12 Bxc6 Qxc6 13 cxd4 Nd5 equalizes comfortably.

10 ... Be7 11 Qb3

11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 cxd4 0-0 is equal, while after 11 cxd4 Nxd4 12 Bxb7 Rb8 13 Ba6 0-0, Black has a very slight advantage due to

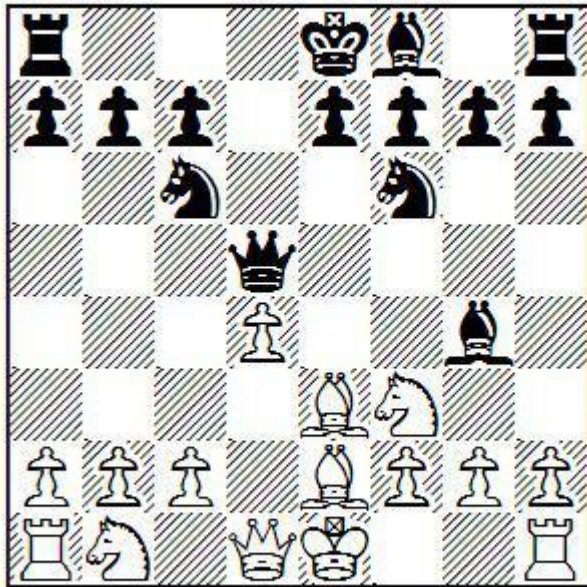
more active pieces, An.Fernandes-R.Damaso, Portuguese Championship (play-off) 1992.

11 ... Rb8 12 Bxc6 Qxc6



This position is quite acceptable for Black. For example, 13 Bg5 (13 cxd4 0-0! is equal) 13 ... h6 14 Bh4 was E.Liss-Y.Afek, Herzliya 1998, and now Black can improve with 14 ... Rd8! 15 Nd2 g5! 16 Bg3 dxc3 17 Nc4 Nd5 with mutual chances.

D3: 6 Be3

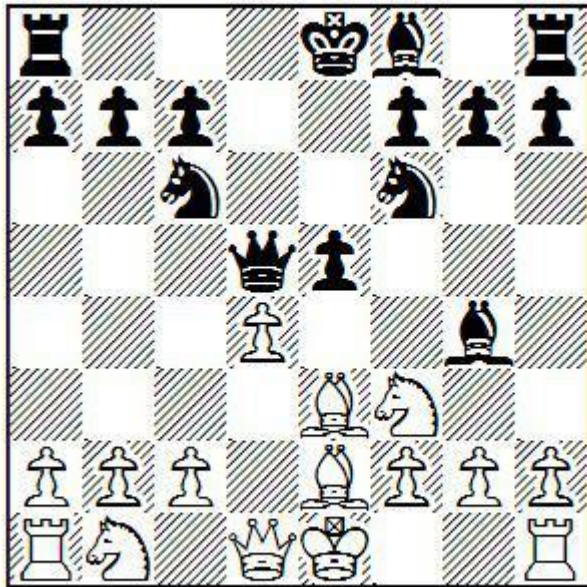


Black now has two active choices: 6 ... 0-0-0 is popular and consistent, and will usually transpose into lines considered later on, but the sharp 6 ... e5!? is a worthy alternative.

D31: 6 ... e5!?

D32: 6 ... 0-0-0

D31: 6 ... e5!?



I was alerted to this extra possibility by Australian IM Guy West, and a lot of the analysis that follows originates from him.

7 Nc3

7 c4 is met by 7 ... Qa5+!, when White must block with care: 8 Nc3! (after 8 Nbd2?! Bxf3 9 Bxf3 exd4, Black is slightly better; while 8 Bd2?! Bb4 9 d5 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Nd4 11 Nc3 Qc5 12 Be2 c6! leaves Black at least equal) 8 ... Nxd4! 9 Nxd4 exd4 10 Bxd4 Be6! with chances for both sides.

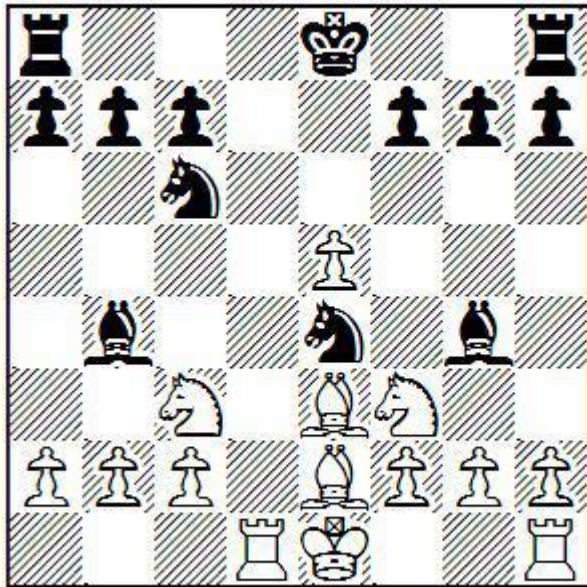
7 ... Bb4 8 dxe5

Or 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 bxc3 0-0 10 c4 Qd6! with balanced chances; but not 8 Nxe5? Nxe5 9 dxe5 Qxg2! and Black is winning.

8 ... Qxd1+ 9 Rxd1

9 Bxd1?! Ne4! favours Black.

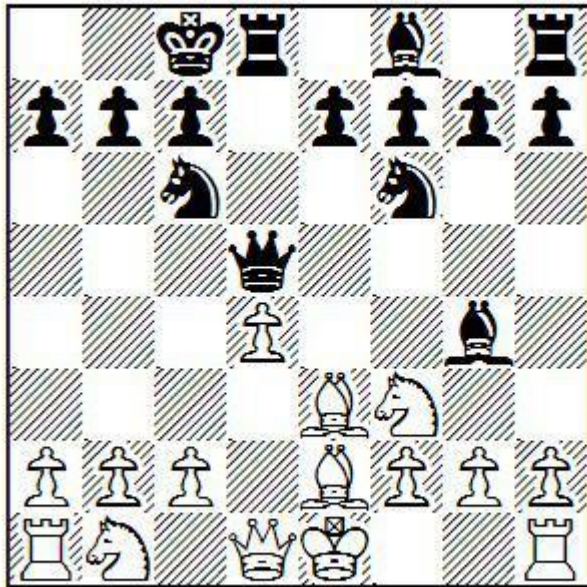
9 ... Ne4!



Black's activity fully compensates for the pawn deficit. Some sample lines:

- a) 10 Nd2 Bxe2 11 Kxe2 Nxd2 12 Bxd2 0-0-0 13 f4 Nd4+ is equal.
- b) 10 Bd2 Nxd2 11 Rxd2 0-0 12 0-0 Rab8 is also completely equal.
- c) 10 Bd4 0-0-0 11 0-0 Nxd4 12 Nxd4 Bxe2 13 Ncxe2 Rhe8 14 f4 f6, again with equality.

D32: 6 ... 0-0-0

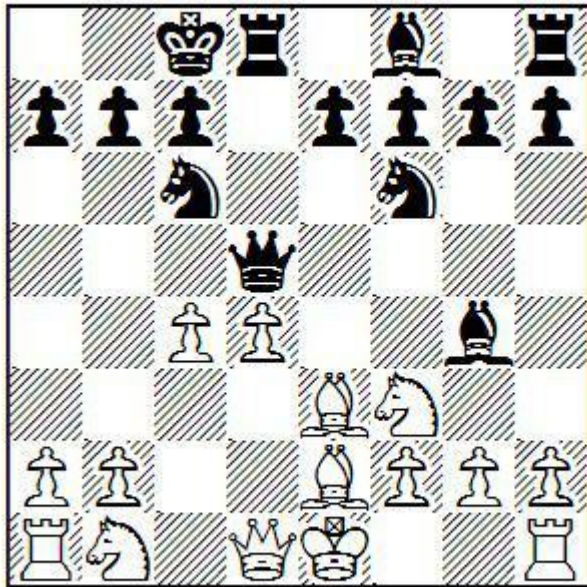


Here, White usually continues with 7 0-0, which we will consider under line D43 (6 0-0 0-0-0 7 Be3). Instead, 7 Nc3? immediately gifts Black the advantage after 7 ... Qf5!, but White has two genuine alternatives:

D321: 7 c4

D322: 7 Nbd2

D321: 7 c4



The plethora of move-orders in the Classical can be a real handful. Fortunately, Black's central themes and ideas are common across most of them, but this is one to commit to memory, as the natural 7 ... Qh5?! is a slight error.

7 ... Qf5

Alternatively:

a) 7 ... Qh5?! 8 0-0? e5! transposes to line D41, which is very favourable for Black. However, 8 Nbd2! is good for White, even if the lines are still very tricky: 8 ... e5 9 d5 Nd4 10 Nxd4 exd4 11 Bxg4+ (11 Bxd4 Bxe2 12 Qxe2 Re8 13 Be3 Qg6 14 0-0 Ng4 gives Black good compensation, E.Romanov-I.Lysyj, St Petersburg 2007) 11 ... Nxg4 12 Bxd4 Re8+! (12 ... Bb4?! 13 h3 Bxd2+ 14 Kxd2! Qg5+ 15 Kc3! is winning for White, A.Morozevich-I.Rogers, German League 1999) 13 Kf1 Nxe2+ 14 Kg1 Qxd1+ 15 Rxd1 Ng4 16 f3 Ne5 17 Re1 f6 and White has a pleasant endgame, although Black has good chances to hold, I.Rogers-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2005.

b) 7 ... Qa5+!? is an interesting sideline that seems to be quite respectable. For example, 8 Nc3 e6 9 0-0 Bc5 10 Nb5 (or if 10 a3 then 10 ... Qa6! 11 b4 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Bxd4 13 b5 Qa5 14 bxc6 Bxc3 is acceptable for Black) 10 ... a6 11 Qb3 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 axb5 13 dxc5 bxc4 14 Qxc4 Ne5 with equality.

8 Nc3

Instead:

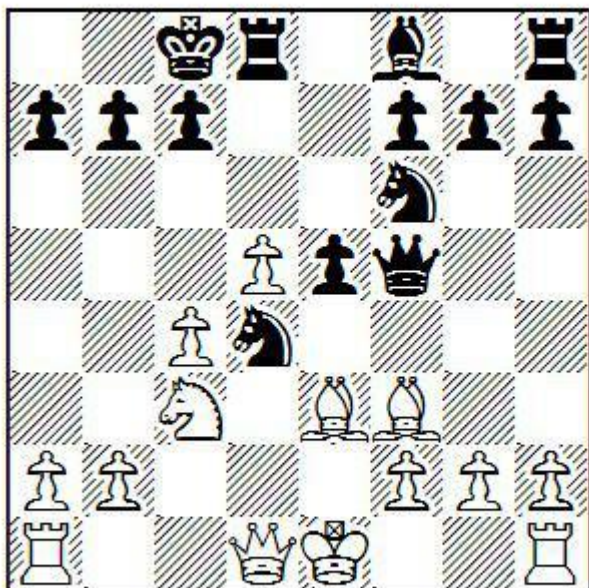
a) 8 0-0 will be considered under D432 below.

b) 8 Nbd2? doesn't work in this line, as we have seen before: 8 ... e5! 9 d5 (or 9 dxe5 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Nxe5 11 0-0 c6 with a slight advantage to Black) 9 ... Nb4 10 0-0 Nc2 11 Rc1 Nxe3 12 fxe3 Bc5 and Black is comfortably better.

8 ... e5 9 d5

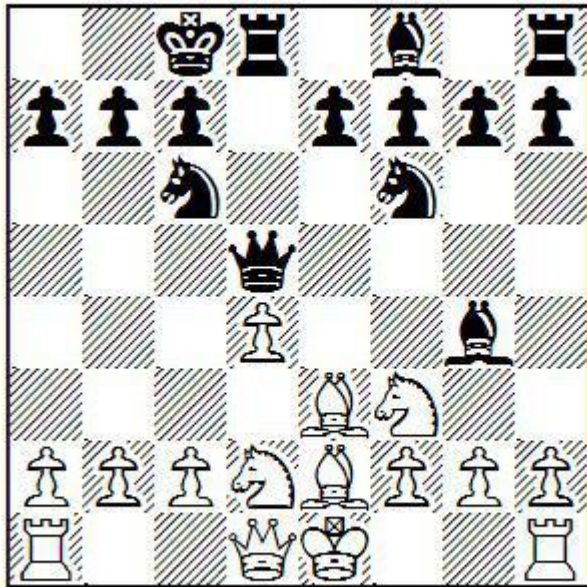
Now Black should embark on a promising pawn sacrifice:

9 ... Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Nd4!



Black has excellent play for the pawn. For instance, 11 Bxd4 exd4 12 Qxd4 Re8+ 13 Kd2 (or 13 Kf1 b6! with compensation; and not 13 Be2?! Bb4 14 f3? Qc2! 15 0-0 Bxc3 0-1 F.Skokan-M.Holubcik, Prague 2007) 13 ... Nd7! (an improvement on J.M.Lopez Martinez-O.De la Riva Aguado, Seville 2004), when Black secures dangerous play on the dark squares.

D322: 7 Nbd2



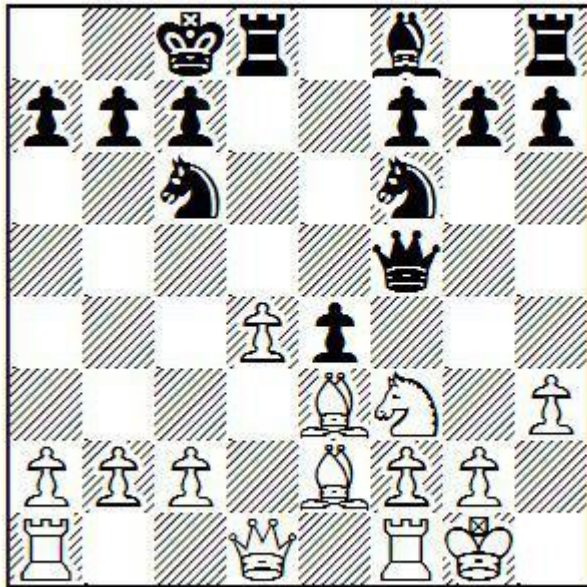
By blocking the a5-e1 diagonal, White signals her intention to meet ... e7-e5 with c2-c4, after which Black's queen might start to feel uncomfortable. Therefore, voluntarily swinging the queen to the kingside is recommended.

7 ... Qf5! 8 h3?!

Other moves transpose elsewhere: 8 0-0 is line D431, while 8 c4?! was seen in the notes to D321.

8 ... Bxf3 9 Nxf3 e5! 10 0-0 e4!

10 ... exd4 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 Bc5 is only equality; we want more!



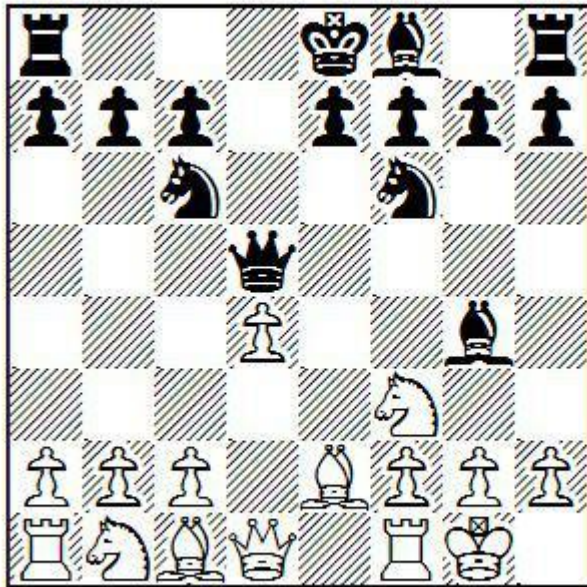
11 Nh4

Or 11 Ne1 Nxd4! 12 Bxd4 c5 13 c3 cxd4 14 cxd4 Kb8 with an edge for Black.

11 ... Qe6 12 c3 g6

Black is better; 13 ... Be7 follows, targeting White's offside knight.

D4: 6 0-0



Perhaps the most sensible of White's sixth-move alternatives. White prepares Be3 without fear of an immediate ... e7-e5, as she can then attack the black queen with c2-c4 or Nc3 untroubled by any irritations on the a5-e1 diagonal. This will be the thickest of the subsections of this chapter, but this is mainly because I will cover most of the more common transpositions via this move-order.

6 ... 0-0-0

Not 6 ... e5? 7 Nc3! and White is clearly better, since ... Bb4 isn't possible.

Now:

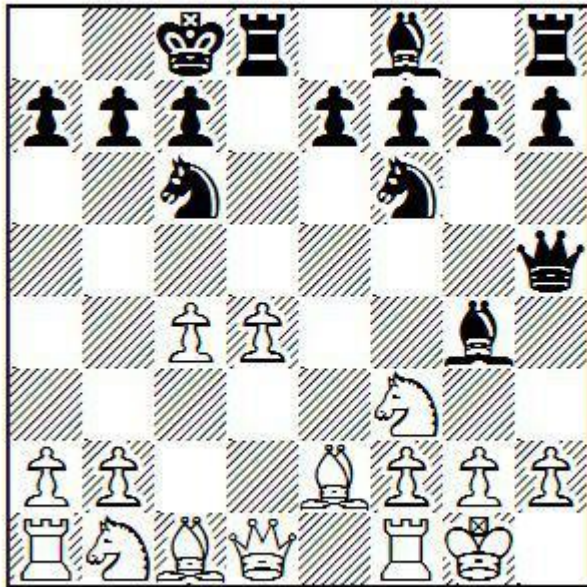
D41: 7 c4?

D42: 7 c3

D43: 7 Be3

Instead, 7 Nc3? Qh5? transposes back to line C3; but 7 ... Qf5!, intending ... e7-e5, is even stronger, when Black is clearly better.

D41: 7 c4? Qh5!



Even better than 7 ... Qf5, when 8 Be3 transposes to line D432 below. White's position is hanging by a thread.

8 Be3?

A natural continuation and the most popular move, but it meets with a swift counterstroke.

Other moves:

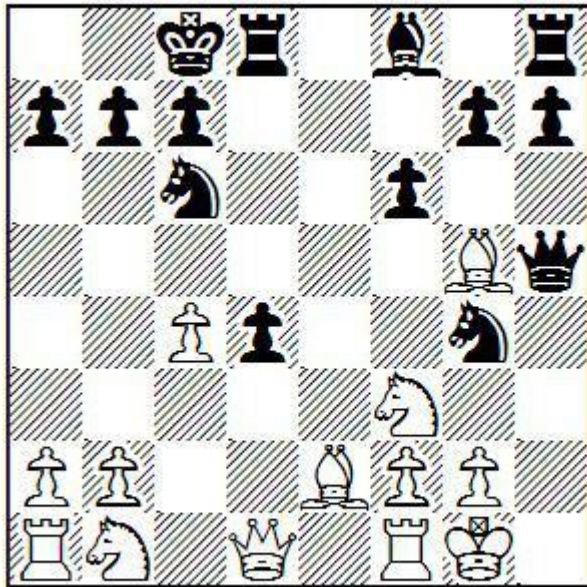
a) 8 h3? Nxd4! 9 Nxd4 Bxe2 10 Qxe2 Rxd4 wins a pawn for nothing, R.Pegg-T.Strand, correspondence 2002.

b) 8 d5 Ne5 (or 8 ... e6!?, with a slight edge) 9 Nbd2 e6 10 Qa4 Kb8 and Black's attack is faster, W.Rosen-J.Klovans, Weilburg 1998.

8 ... e5! 9 h3

Or 9 d5? e4 and White, an IM, resigned in De.Stojanovski-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014. My opponent wasn't the only victim of this neat trap; about 20 players have fallen foul with the white pieces, including most notably Women's World Champion, Hou Yifan.

9 ... exd4! 10 hxg4 Nxg4 11 Bg5 f6



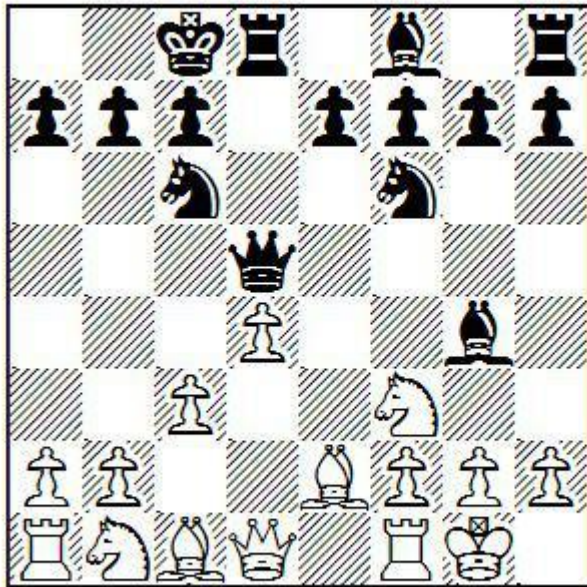
12 Nh4

Or 12 Bh4 d3! blasts open the d-file. After 13 Bxd3 Nb4 14 Nh2! (or 14 Ne5!) 14 ... Rxd3!! 15 Qxg4+ Qxg4 16 Nxg4 Nc2 17 Nc3 Nxa1 18 Rxa1 Ba3!, Black has a clear advantage.

12 ... Nce5 13 Bf4 Qxh4

Black is winning, M.Bjelajac-D.Sahovic, Novi Sad 1978.

D42: 7 c3



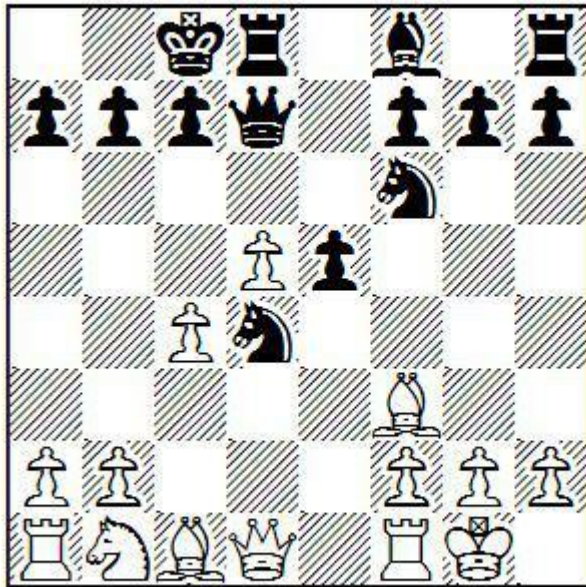
7 ... e5

Instead:

a) 7 ... Qh5? 8 h3! e5 9 hxg4 Nxg4 10 Nh4! (not 10 Nbd2 exd4 11 Ne4?? d3! 12 Bxd3 Nce5 13 Ng3 Nxf3+ 0-1 *Labourdonnais* (2500)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012) 10 ... f5 11 Qd3! refutes Black's sacrifice on this occasion.

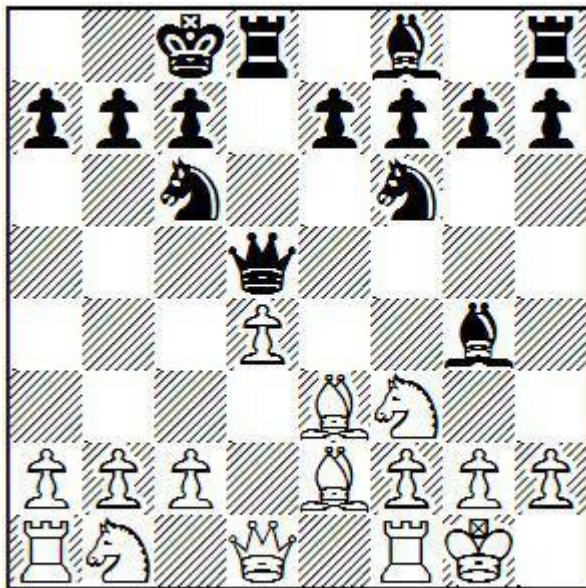
b) 7 ... e6 8 h3! is slightly better for White, although the unexplored 8 ... h5!? is worth attention. Note that the bishop is immune: 9 hxg4? hxg4 10 Ng5 Bd6 11 f4 Rh2!!, and if 12 Kxh2 then 12 ... Qxg5, gives Black a very strong attack.

8 c4 Qd7 9 d5 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Nd4



The game is balanced. White has a strong centre for now, but Black's control over the dark squares provides adequate positional compensation.

D43: 7 Be3



An accurate move-order, provoking Black to voluntarily relocate her queen.

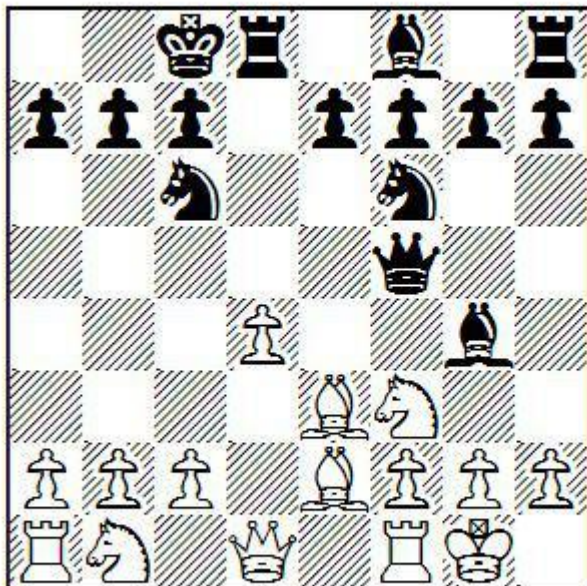
7 ... Qf5!?

Alternatively:

a) 7 ... e6 is playable but passive. White is slightly better after 8 Nbd2.

b) 7 ... Bxf3!? is interesting: 8 Bxf3 Qd6 9 c3 e5 10 Na3 Qe6 with just a slight advantage to White, Z.Hracek-M.Muse, Croatian Team Championship 2012.

c) 7 ... Qh5 is what Black really wants to play. In practice, she scores extremely well with this move, but in the cold, hard light of computer analysis, it doesn't quite work: 8 h3 e5 9 Nbd2! (9 hxg4 Nxg4 10 Nh4? f5!, with a crushing attack, has been seen many times in practice; 10 Nbd2 is better, though 10 ... f5! still gives Black dangerous compensation for the piece) 9 ... Bd6? (consistent, but losing; 9 ... Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Qg6 is an attempt to bail out, though 11 Bxc6 exd4 12 Bxb7+ Kxb7 13 Qf3+ must favour White to some extent) 10 hxg4 Nxg4 11 Ne4! (or 11 Nh4 f5 12 Bxg4 fxg4 13 d5! etc) 11 ... Nxd4 12 Bxd4 exd4 13 Nxd6+ Rxd6 14 Nh4! with a decisive material advantage.



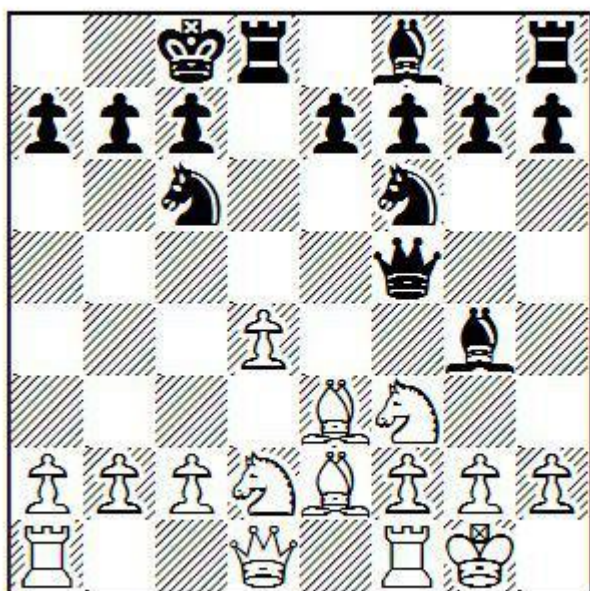
The diagram signals an important branch for this line. 8 Nbd2 is a safe choice, steering away from tactics and towards a level, 'clean' middlegame. 8 c4 is sharper and more popular in practice, but it also gives Black excellent chances for an advantage.

D431: 8 Nbd2

D432: 8 c4

8 h3?! is a mistake due to 8 ... Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Nxd4! 10 Bxd4 e5 11 c3 exd4 12 cxd4 c6 and Black is slightly better after this standard tactical operation.

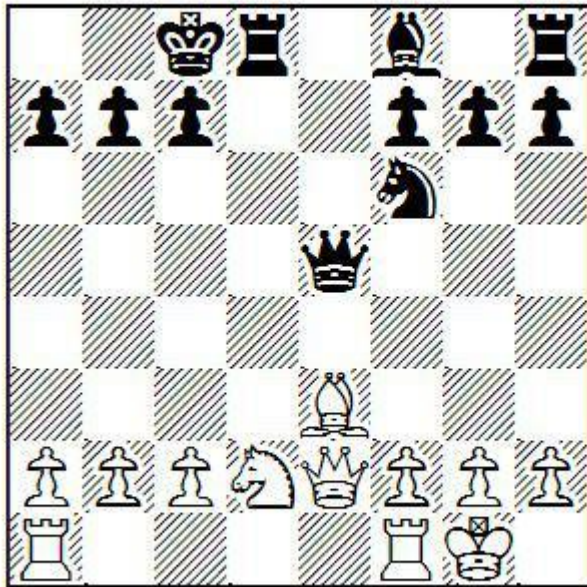
D431: 8 Nbd2



8 ... e5

8 ... Bxf3!? is an interesting alternative, reinstating the pin on the d-file: 9 Nxf3 e5 10 c3 Nd5! with a murky position. The only game to reach here continued 11 Bd3 e4 12 Bb1?! (12 Bc2 must surely be better) 12 ... Bd6?! (12 ... Qg6! favours Black) 13 Nd2 Rhe8 with chances for both sides, D.Pustovoitova-V.Bukhteeva, Moscow 2008.

9 Nxe5 Bxe2 10 Qxe2 Nxe5 11 dxe5 Qxe5



A key position for the Classical. White has played accurately, avoiding Black's many traps and pitfalls, and has been rewarded with ... what, exactly? Despite the symmetrical material and pawn structure, White's 'first-move advantage' in this position gives her slight pressure for the moment. Black must play precisely over the next few moves, but accuracy will ensure equality.

12 Nf3

12 Nc4 Qe4! 13 Rfe1 Bd6 14 Nxd6+ Rxd6 was equal in L.Stumbries-S.Krivoshey, Canarias en Red, Internet (blitz) 2004.

12 ... Qe4!

The key idea, maintaining the pin on the bishop. 12 ... Qa5!? is also promising, and if 13 Qc4 then 13 ... Qd5!.

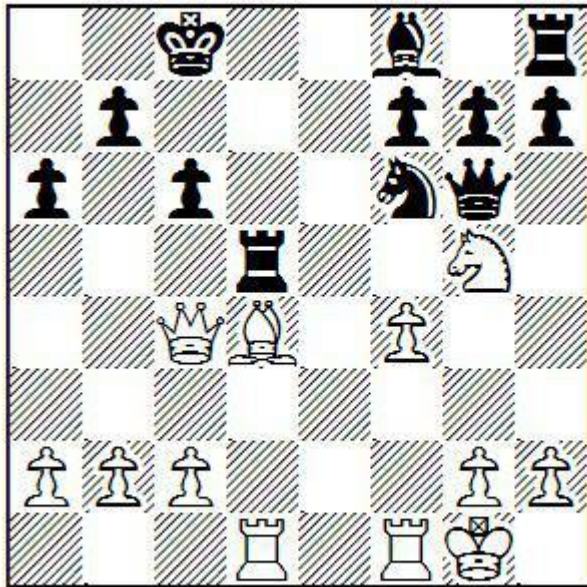
13 Ng5

We saw 13 Rfe1 in Game 13 (Rogers-Smerdon), and here 13 ... Bd6! 14 Bd4 Qxe2 15 Rxe2 Rhe8 is equal; Black has little to fear from doubled pawns on f7 and f6.

13 ... Qg6 14 Qc4 Rd5! 15 f4

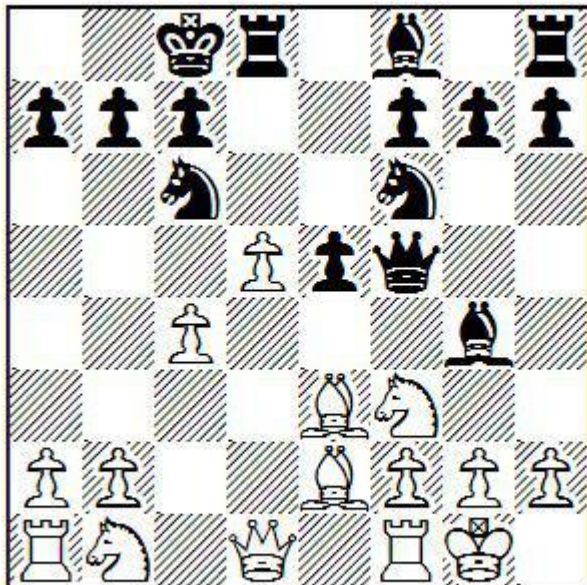
Or 15 Nf3 Qg4 16 Qb3 Bd6 and Black will soon reach full equality.

15 ... a6 16 Rad1 c6 17 Bd4!



H.Behling-Ai.De Souza, correspondence 2006, and now the simplest continuation is the forcing 17 ... h6 18 Bxf6 (or 18 Nf3 Bd6 with equality) 18 ... Bc5+ 19 Bd4 Bxd4+ 20 Rxd4 Rxd4 21 Qxd4 hxd4 22 fxd4 Qxd4 23 Rxf7 Rd8! with a draw.

D432: 8 c4 e5 9 d5



9 ... e4

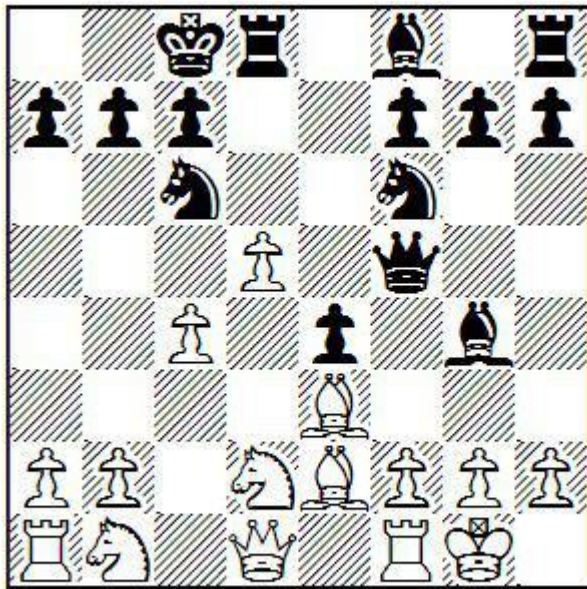
9 ... Bxf3!? 10 Bxf3 e4 11 Be2 Ne5 12 Nc3 a6! (slowing down White's attack by more than the spent tempo) 13 Qc2 Qg6 14 Kh1 h5! gave Black a surprisingly dangerous attack in D.Teichmeister-P.Spitz, correspondence 1999, although modern engines continue to favour White here.

After the text, White has an important choice, but Black can drum up serious attacking potential against either alternative:

D4321: 10 Nfd2

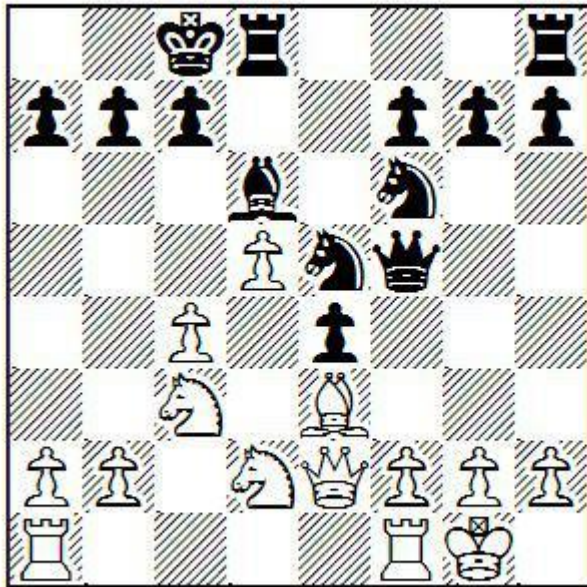
D4322: 10 Nd4

D4321: 10 Nfd2



10 ... Ne5 11 Nc3 Bxe2 12 Qxe2 Bd6

12 ... Bb4!? is a promising option, certainly if Black must avoid a draw.



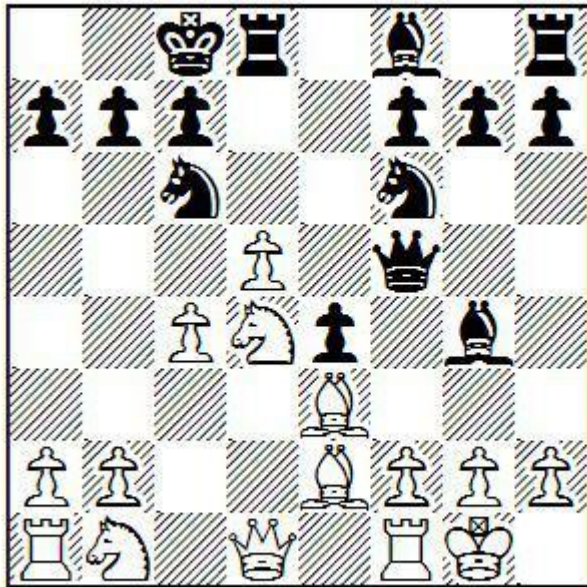
Black has surprisingly dangerous kingside pressure, and White must be careful:

a) 13 Bxa7?! Nf3+ 14 Nxf3 (14 gxf3?? Qf4 checkmates in two moves) 14 ... exf3 15 Qxf3 Qxf3 16 gxf3 b6! traps the bishop, giving Black a clear advantage, Ha.Schneider-P.Corbat, correspondence 2009.

b) 13 c5 Nf3+! 14 gxf3 Bxh2+ 15 Kxh2 Qh5+ 16 Kg1 Qg6+ is a draw.

c) 13 Nb5 a6 14 Nxd6+ Rxd6 15 b4 Nfg4! with equal chances.

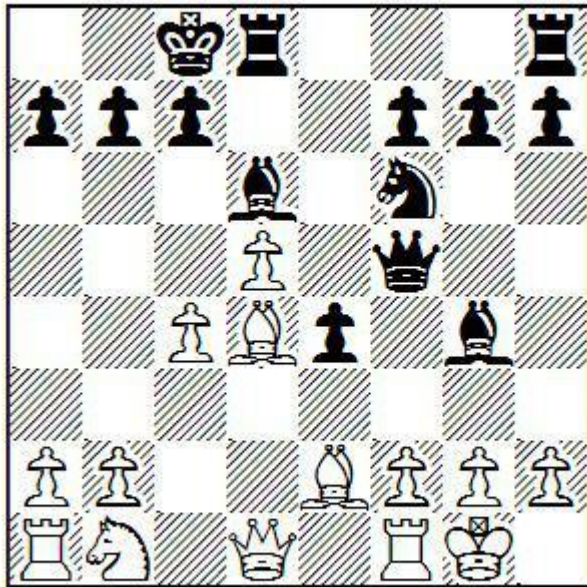
D4322: 10 Nd4



10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4

It is worth paying attention to this line, as it has been recommended in some modern texts and has recently been played by a couple of strong grandmasters. Happily for Black, there are plenty of juicy tactical opportunities for us in this position, whereas White really needs to be on her guard just to survive the attack.

11 ... Bd6



12 Re1

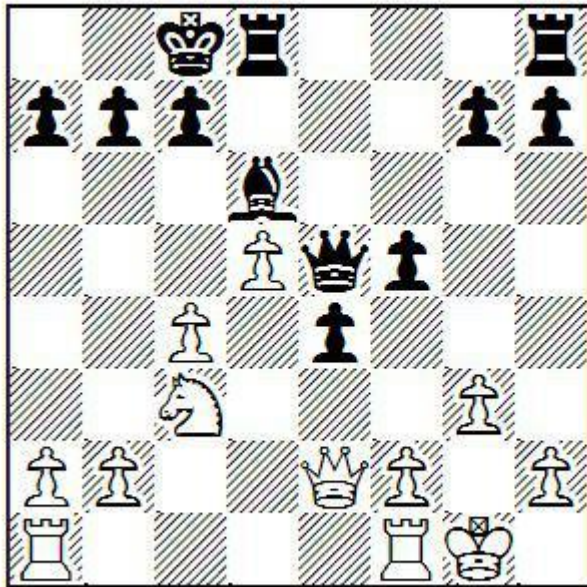
The choice of GMs Demchenko and Yu Ruiyuan, with which they both beat Laylo in 2014. However, Black has an important improvement, after which White can realistically hope for a draw at best.

Other moves:

a) 12 Bxg4? Nxg4 13 h3 Nh2! 14 Re1 Nf3+! with a crushing attack, *kifa13* (2282)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

b) 12 Nc3 Bxe2 (12 ... Rhe8 13 Re1 Be5 14 Bxe5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Qxe5 is marginally better for White, J.Kerbrat-S.Krivoshey, French Team Championship 2005) 13 Qxe2 Ng4! 14 h3 Nh2 15 Rfd1 Nf3+! with an attack worth at least a draw. See Game 15 (Lazic-Sulava).

c) 12 Bxf6 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 is a popular and natural continuation, and here Black is spoilt for choice: 13 ... Qxf6 (13 ... gxf6!? is a more aggressive alternative, when 14 Nc3 Qe5 15 f4?! exf3 16 Qxe5 Bc5+! 17 Kh1 fxc2+ 18 Kxc2 fxe5 19 Rxf7 Rhg8+ 20 Kf3 Rdf8 gave Black a clear endgame advantage in *Blitzstream* (2311)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014) 14 Nc3 Qe5 15 g3 f5.



This position has occurred often in practice, and Black has an understandably fantastic score. With more space, better pieces and a straightforward plan of attacking White's vulnerable kingside defences, Black's position is both superior and easier to play. For example, 16 Rad1 (if 16 f4? then 16 ... Qf6 17 a3 Bc5+ 18 Kh1 h5 with a clear advantage, or 16 Nb5 c6! 17 dxc6 bxc6 18 Nxd6+ Rxd6 and Black is slightly better) 16 ... h5! 17 f4?! Bc5+ 18 Kg2 Qf6 19 h4 Rh6 and again Black is clearly better, I.Gaponenko-A.Kosteniuk, Women's World Blitz Championship, Moscow 2010.

Returning to the position after 12 Re1, the removal of another defensive piece from the white kingside signals to Black that an attack is the principled response, and so she should continue:

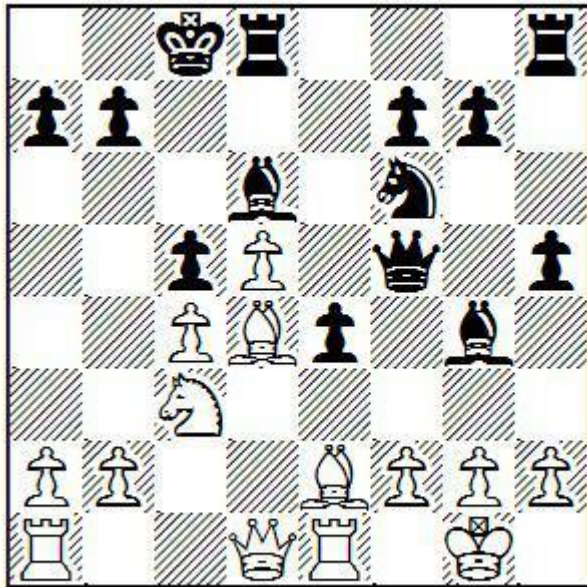
12 ... h5!

A strong novelty suggested by IM Guy West. Now after 13 h3? Bxh3 14 gxh3? Qxh3, Black is checkmating, while 13 Bxg4?? hxg4 fatally opens the h-file against the white king. But the key idea is to meet the natural ...

13 Nc3

... with a surprising pawn advance. (13 Nd2 c5! is a similar, and improved, version of the main line.)

13 ... c5!!



An excellent and, I dare say, unexpected central thrust, courtesy of the creative chess kitchen of IM West, after which Black's attack should not be underestimated. White has plenty of ways to go wrong in this position, even if analysis suggests that there exists a narrow path to force a draw. However, I would advise you not to be put off by that fact – if White is shrewd and good enough to find her way through the tactical quagmire, then a draw is nothing about which we should complain!

14 dxc6!

White bravely initiates a one-piece counter-attack, and in fact this is absolutely necessary. Her two alternatives are more perilous:

a) 14 Bxf6 gxf6! (with the idea of ... Qe5 and ... f6-f5, among others) 15 g3 Be5! sees the bishop enter the attack, heading for d4, with decisive effect: 16 Qc2 (16 Bxg4 hxg4! prepares an invasion on the h-file; e.g. 17 Nxe4?? Rh3 with a decisive attack) 16 ... Bd4! 17 Bxg4 (17 Nxe4?? Bxf2+! wins) 17 ... hxg4 18 Nxe4 Qh5! 19 h4 gxh3 20 Qe2 f5! with a tremendous attack.

b) 14 Be3 Bxe2 (14 ... a6!? is a worthy alternative, simply shoring up the queenside before embarking on the standard attacking ideas of ... Bxe2 and ... Ng4) 15 Qxe2 Ng4! 16 h3 (16 g3? Nxh2!! 17 Kxh2 h4 is decisive) 16 ... Ne5 plans to sacrifice on f3 with a dangerous

attack (16 ... Qe5!? 17 g3 Nxe3 18 Qxe3 f5 leads to a balanced fight). For instance, 17 Bd2 Nf3+! 18 gxf3 (18 Kf1?! Rhe8 clearly favours Black) 18 ... Qxh3 19 f4 (blocking Black's bishop, but also blocking White's, so ...) 19 ... Rh6! 20 Nxe4 Rg6+ 21 Ng3 h4! 22 Qh5! Rg4!!, again with a fierce attack.

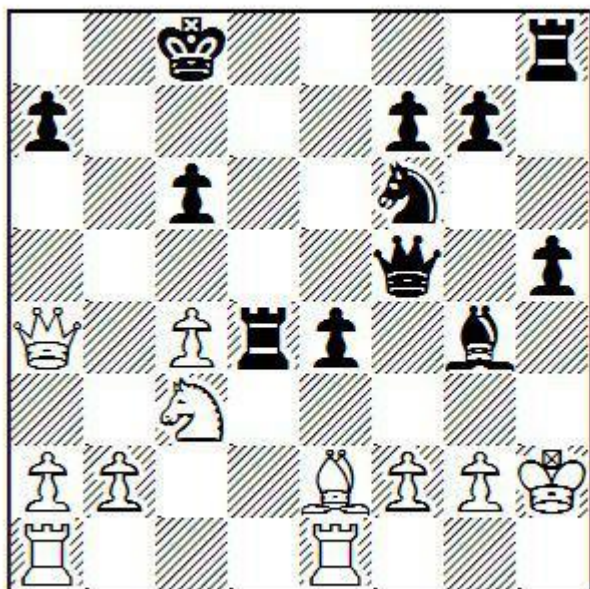
14 ... bxc6 15 Qa4!

The only way to make sense of White's voluntary opening of the d-file.

15 ... Bxh2+!

Black, too, has no choice. The game now becomes incredibly sharp, with both kings finding themselves precariously exposed.

16 Kxh2 Rxd4



Black's forces are more actively placed, but White has the move, which can be so important in these attacking races often decided by a single tempo.

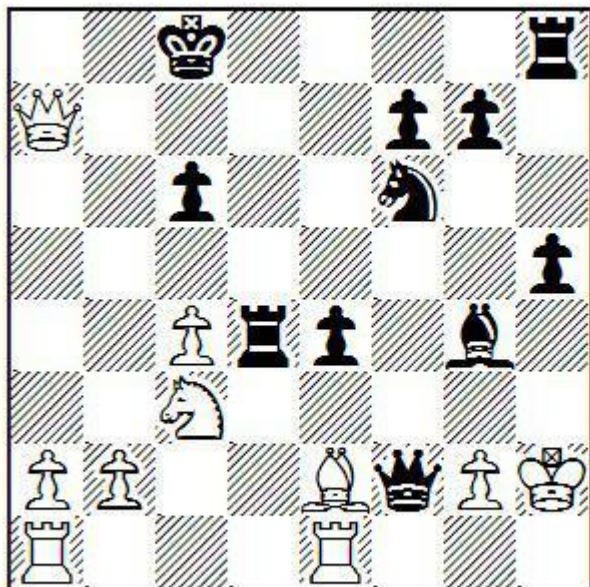
17 Qxa7

17 Qxc6+ Kb8 is the alternative. In these lines, Black's king is well advised to stay away from the open d-file. The position is tactically balanced and should end in a draw with best play. Some sample variations: 18 Nd5 (not 18 Rad1? Rxd1 19 Rxd1 Bxe2 20 Qd6+ Kb7 21 Nxe2 Ng4+ 22 Kg1 Qxf2+ 23 Kh1 Qf6! with a clear advantage to

Black; or 18 Nb5?! Rc8! 19 Nxd4 Qf4+ 20 Kg1 Rxc6 21 Nxc6+ Kc7 22 Nb4 e3! and Black's attack is extremely dangerous) 18 ... Nxd5 19 Qd6+! Kb7 20 cxd5 Qxd5 21 Ba6+ Ka8 22 Qxd5+ Rxd5 23 Rxe4 Rd2 24 Re7 Rxf2 25 b4 with a level endgame.

17 ... Qxf2!

17 ... Qf4+ 18 Kg1 e3 19 Rf1! favours White.



There are several options for both sides that lead to a forced draw in this position, but you don't need to remember them. The two most important points to note are: Black's king generally shouldn't traverse the d-file when checked; and meanwhile her best attacking options are usually served via the typical theme of ... Bxe2, followed by ... Ng4.

Some plausible continuations:

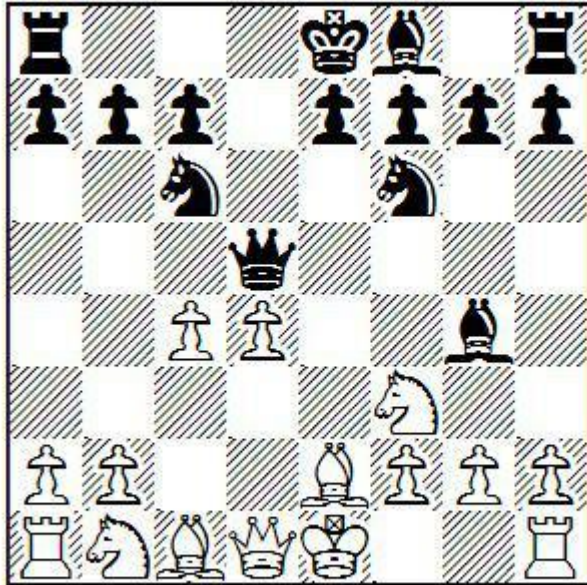
a) 18 Qa8+ Kc7 19 Qa7+ (not 19 Qxh8?? Bf3! 20 Qxg7 Ng4+ and Black checkmates) 19 ... Kc8 with a draw.

b) 18 Rad1?! allows Black to demonstrate an exception to the rule with 18 ... Bxe2! 19 Qa6+ (19 Qxd4? Ng4+! 20 Kh3 Bxd1 wins for Black) 19 ... Kd7!?, although 20 Nxe2 Ng4+ 21 Kh3 Qe3+ 22 Ng3 Nf2+ 23 Kh2 Ng4+ is still a draw.

c) 18 Rf1 Qh4+ 19 Kg1 Rd7! 20 Qa8+ Kc7 21 Qxh8 Bxe2 22 Rxf6!! (not 22 Nxe2?? Ng4 and Black delivers mate) 22 ... gxf6 23 Nxe2 (23 Qa8 e3 24 Qa7+ Kc8 25 Qa8+ also draws) 23 ... Rd2! 24 Qe8 Rxe2 25 Qe7+ Kb6 26 Rf1 Qg3 27 Qb4+ Kc7 28 Qe7+ and finally we

end with a well-earned draw by perpetual check.

D5: 6 c4



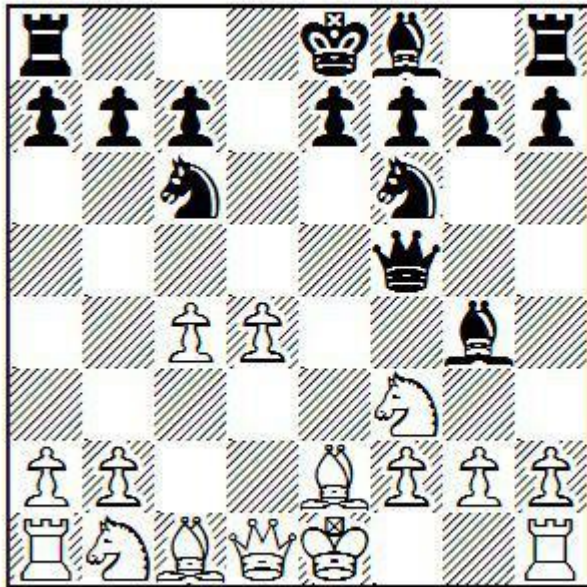
The most popular move, and the choice of many grandmasters. White commits her c-pawn but, more importantly, forces Black to commit her queen. Over the next few moves play is likely to transpose to one of the lines already considered, but there are a few independent tries.

6 ... Qf5

Instead:

a) 6 ... Qh5?! 7 Be3 (here 7 0-0?! 0-0-0 transposes to D41, which is favourable for Black; whereas 7 d5 is thought to favour White, but then 7 ... Ne5 8 Qa4+ c6! is messy) 7 ... 0-0-0 8 Nbd2! takes us back to 7 ... Qh5?! 8 Nbd2! in the notes to line D321, which leads to a slightly better endgame for White.

b) 6 ... Qd7 is quite respectable and was actually Jadoul's original choice. However, it is not really consistent with our repertoire, and I don't want to confuse you any further in the Classical!



7 Be3

Other moves:

a) 7 Nc3 0-0-0 8 Be3 transposes to line D321.

b) 7 0-0 0-0-0 8 Be3 is line D432.

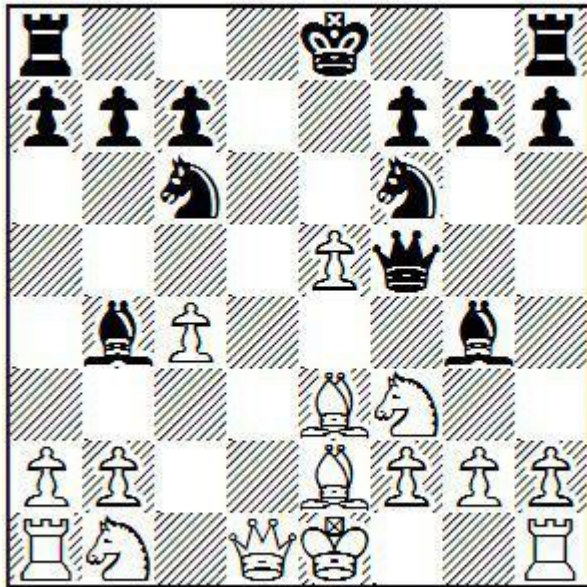
c) 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 0-0-0! 9 Bxc6 (not 9 Be3? Nxd4 10 Bxd4 c6! and Black will emerge a pawn up; White could try the novelty 9 Qb3!? e5! 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 0-0 exd4 12 Nd2 Nd7!, but her compensation for the pawn is not quite sufficient) 9 ... Qe6+! 10 Qe2 Qxc6 wins a pawn for limited compensation.

d) 7 d5?! is an independent line, but not a good one: 7 ... 0-0-0 8 Qa4? (but after 8 0-0 e6 9 Nc3 exd5 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Rxd5, as in *GotsosAE* (2400)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013; or 8 Nbd2 Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Ne5, Black is clearly better) 8 ... Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Nd4 10 Qxa7 (10 Bd1? Qe4+ is just winning) 10 ... Qd3! gives Black a decisive attack; for example, 11 Bd1 e6 12 Nc3 exd5 13 Be3 Nc6 14 Qa8+ Kd7 15 Qa4 Bb4 and Black is running all over the white forces.

7 ... e5! 8 dxe5

Or 8 d5 Nb4 9 Na3 Bxf3 10 gxf3 0-0-0 with an unbalanced position in which Black's chances are not unfavourable, P.Boll-Hen.Danielsen, correspondence 2000.

8 ... Bb4+!



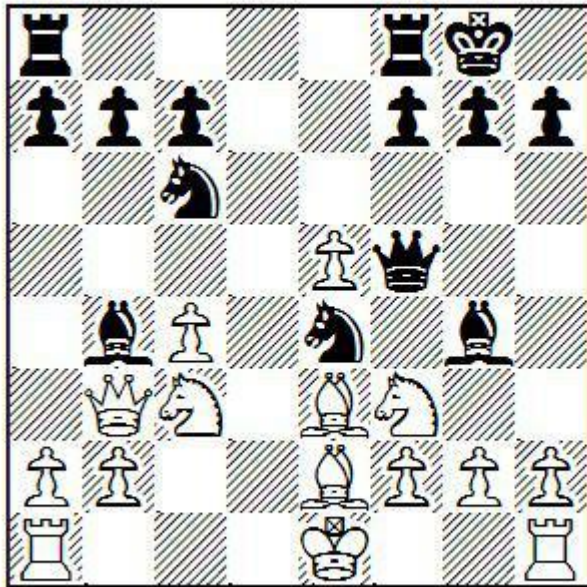
9 Nc3!

Other moves are worse:

a) 9 Nbd2? Bxf3! 10 exf6 (10 Bxf3 Nxe5 11 Qa4+ c6 is clearly better for Black) 10 ... Bxe2 leads to a long, forcing sequence: 11 fxg7 Rg8 12 Qxe2 0-0-0! 13 0-0 Bxd2 14 Bxd2 Nd4 15 Qd1 Rxg7 16 f3 Nc2 17 Rc1 Ne3 18 Bxe3 Rxd1 19 Rcx d1 Qc2 with a technically winning endgame, although Black will need to show some technique.

b) 9 Bd2?! Bxd2+ 10 Nbx d2 Nh5! and Black is better; e.g. 11 0-0?! Nf4! with a huge attack.

9 ... Ne4!? 10 Qb3 0-0



Black has excellent compensation for the pawn.

Section One – Conclusion

With that, we come to the end of our discussion of 3 d4, which you will encounter more often than not at White's third move. This is by far the largest and most diverse section in the book; I haven't called it a "complex" for nothing! Still, there is a large crossover of common ideas and motifs for both sides throughout the variations, so there are definitely some synergies to be earned from a close study.

As we have seen, 3 ... Bg4 often leads to wild, sharp positions in which the chances of catching out your opponent with a sneaky tactical trap, or winning a dazzling attacking miniature, are very real. Much enjoyment and excitement is to be had, which is why so many of us have succumbed to the charms of this seductive opening.

White's choice of variation after 3 d4 Bg4 can also signal some useful information about your opponent's theoretical preparedness. Generally speaking, players who choose the Wuss, the Lusophobe, or (surprisingly enough) the Banker are unlikely to have come to the board armed with a deep knowledge of the theory. If White instead employs the Jadoul, the Melbourne Shuffle or, especially, the Correspondence Refutation, you should be on your guard. These are

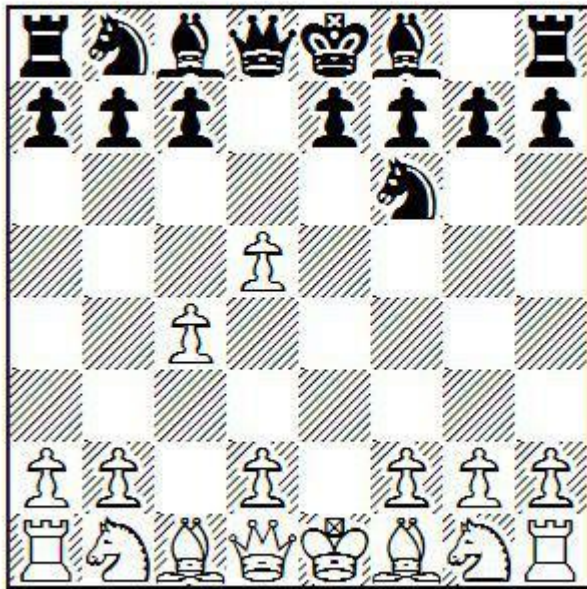
generally the choices of someone who has either learned their book lines (which, as we have seen, is not necessarily a scary thing for us), or who has directly prepared for your encounter. As for players who whip out the Classical: from my experience, it's a bit of a mixed bag.

Of course, all of this should be taken with a grain of salt, as bluffs (and double-bluffs!) are always a possibility. As a general rule, however, I have found that this holds in most cases. Regardless, if you have taken the time to study this section thoroughly, you should feel very optimistic that your knowledge of the complex is greater than that of your opponent. Remember the critical lines of the theory, put your pieces on their normal squares and always keep in mind the standard ideas in each variation, and you can be confident of chalking up some fine victories.

Section Two

Principled Greed

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4



The principled 3 c4 was once a reasonably popular means of meeting the 2 ... Nf6 Scandinavian, particularly as it was thought to force a transposition to the formerly-fashionable Panov-Botvinnik Attack of the Caro-Kann Defence after 3 ... c6 4 d4. The decline in popularity of 3 c4 is due to two important theoretical developments. Firstly, the Panov-Botvinnik Attack is no longer considered one of White's critical attempts at an advantage against the Caro-Kann, with Black having done a good job at refining her defensive strategies over the past few decades. Secondly, and no less importantly, the discovery of the so-called Icelandic Gambit, which is introduced by 3 ... e6, put many white players off the trail. This gambit (which should more appropriately be named the Palme Gambit, after its inventor, the Austrian master Rudolf Palme) gives

Black splendid activity and very real chances of scoring quick victories in tournament play.

In modern times, it seems that 3 c4 is seen as only inviting Black to make a pleasant choice between adopting a rock-solid transposition to an acceptable variation of the Caro-Kann, or unleashing a venomous gambit. Gradually, 3 c4 has slipped down the list of White's frequent third-move alternatives, now sitting behind 3 Nf3, 3 Bb5+ and even 3 Nc3, as well as the still hugely popular main line 3 d4. Despite that, there are good reasons to take 3 c4 seriously. Stylistically, the main lines of the Panov-Botvinnik Attack generally require Black to defend quite passively, usually playing prosaically against a white isolated queen's pawn. On the other hand, the 'accepted' main line of the Icelandic Gambit clearly seems to favour White after accurate play. Bearing this in mind, practically speaking, a player comfortable with the transposition to the Panov-Botvinnik would be advised to consider adopting 3 c4 as their first choice.

Nevertheless, the message in these chapters is quite positive from Black's perspective. First, an important improvement in the main line of the Icelandic Gambit (7 ... Bf5!) resurrects this exciting variation. Secondly, Black has the option (after 3 ... c6) to wield a dangerous sideline in the Panov-Botvinnik that comes complete with surprise value, pawn sacrifices and quick, daring attacks against the white king. I have included my analysis on both options (3 ... e6 and 3 ... c6) so that you can pick and choose your poison according to your tastes and the demands of each situation.

Chapter Nine

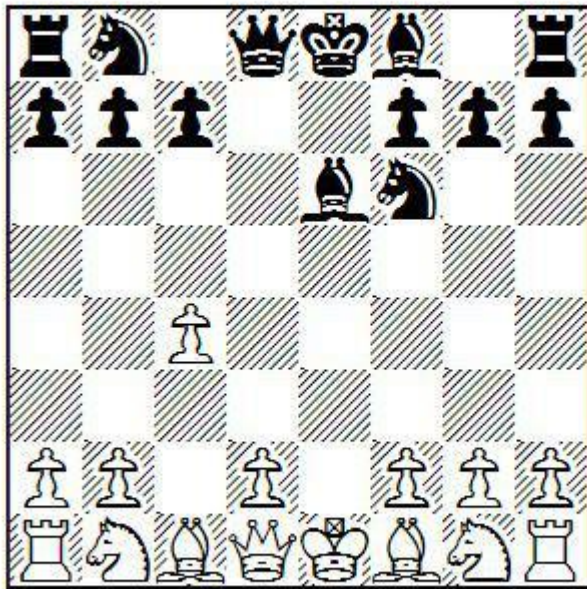
The Icelandic Gambit

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6

The start of the Icelandic (or 'Palme') Gambit, which, despite its dubious nature, remains dangerous at all levels.

4 dxe6 Bxe6



Now we have a real gambit! Black intends rapid development, whirling all of her pieces towards the centre in an effort to catch White out before she has time to complete her mobilization. Typical deployment for Black includes ... Nc6, a further advancement of the light-squared bishop to f5 or g4, and ... Bc5 (if d2-d4 can be prevented) or ... Bb4 (in response to d2-d4). Also, with both kings exposed on the newly-opened e-file, Black often opts to throw in a quick ... Qe7 beforehand in order to disrupt White's coordination.

White has plenty of chances to go wrong in this gambit, but with a precise sequence of moves, she is reckoned to be able to neutralize Black's pressure and begin to capitalize on the extra material. Fortunately, Black can eschew the theoretical main line with the important improvement 7 ... Bf5!, leading to an endgame in which her compensation seems to be sufficient. This will be the subject of our first illustrative game:

Game 16

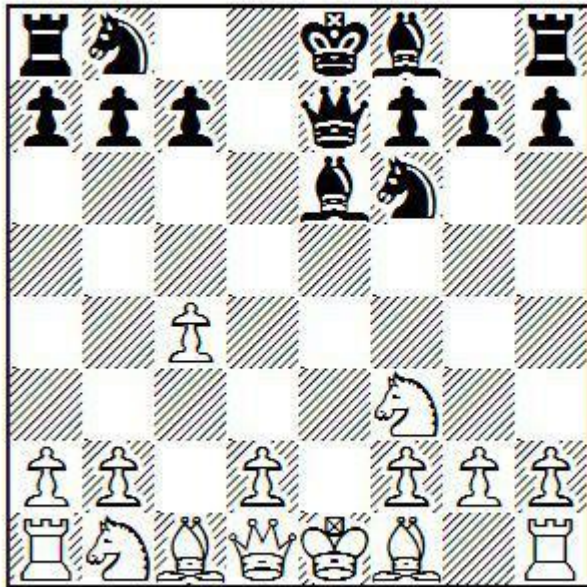
D.Pruess-T.Gareyev

Cappelle la Grande 2007

At the 2004 World Junior Championships in Kochin, India, I was assigned to share a room with the representative from Uzbekistan: an exuberant, thickly-accented sixteen-year-old by the name of Timur Gareyev. One couldn't help but be immediately attracted to his charming eccentricities and his unflappably positive attitude. It was during this event that I first really tested out the 3 ... Bg4 Scandinavian against quality opposition, repeating the opening four times in the tournament. The opening held up well, and I scored a crushing victory over Filipino GM Mark Paragua (see Game 3 in the Jadoul chapter of Section One) and made an important draw with Erwin L'Ami, who would later go on to become one of the top grandmasters in the Netherlands.

Timur, being present at both my morning preparation and poolside post-mortem sessions, asked many questions about "dis crayzee beeshop jee-four gambit", and we had a lot of fun analysing the positions during our Indian fortnight as roommates. Later on, I discovered that Timur had taken up the opening (in addition to cross-country motorbike riding, skydiving and breaking world blindfold chess records – but those are other stories). In this game, Timur, by now a strong grandmaster, shows a deep understanding of Black's endgame compensation in the Icelandic Gambit, playing it in a mature manner.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 dxe6 Bxe6 5 Nf3 Qe7!



This strange move may look ugly at first site, but it echoes a similar principle of the ... Qe7/Qe2 insertion of the Mieses Scotch: White's development is more inconvenienced by her awkward queen placement than Black's.



GM Timur Gareyev – an enterprising maverick well known for his creativity both on and off the board!

6 Qe2 Nc6 7 d4 Bf5!

7 ... Bg4 is also possible and has in the past been considered the main line. But recent analysis seems to suggest that, after 8 Be3, White can allow doubled f-pawns in exchange for the bishop pair, promising her a small advantage.

Black's chances after the more dynamic text are objectively strongest; note that 8 Be3? would now be met by 8 ... Nb4!.

8 Qxe7+

If 8 a3 then 8 ... Na5! prepares ... c7-c5.

8 ... Bxe7 9 Be3

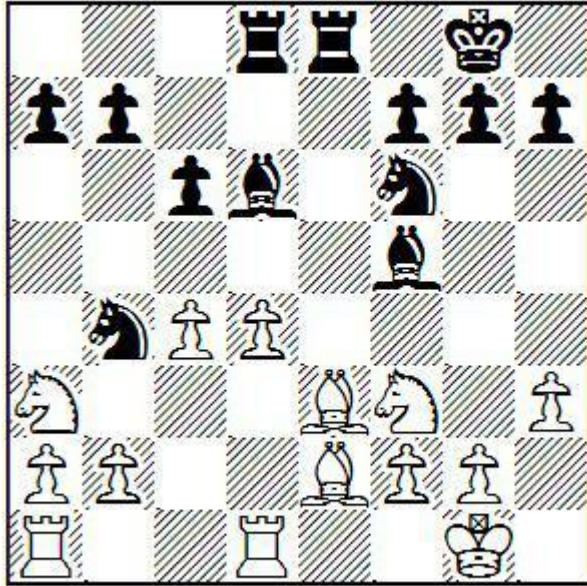
Again, 9 a3 should be met by 9 ... Na5!, intending ... c7-c5; see line B33 in the theory section.

9 ... Nb4! 10 Na3

White has managed to develop some pieces, but the knight on a3 and the rook on a1 remain occupied by the defence of the c2-square and the a2-pawn.

10 ... Ne4?!

10 ... 0-0! was better, when Black's rooks are preparing to take control of the central files. For example, 11 h3 (or 11 Be2 Ng4 12 0-0 Nxe3 13 fxe3 g6 and the bishop pair promises sufficient compensation) 11 ... c6 12 Be2 Rfe8 13 0-0 Rad8 14 Rfd1 Bd6 with full compensation for the pawn.



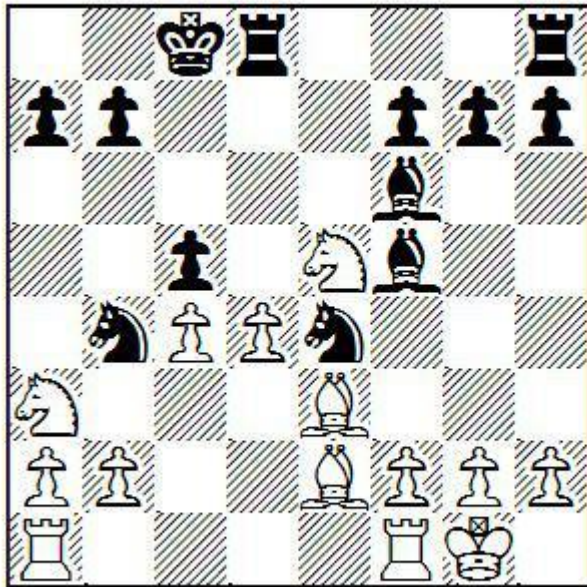
Black can continue with ... b7-b6, ... h7-h6 and slowly improve her position, whereas it is hard to suggest how White can make progress with such tangled pieces. Note that Black often has the useful resource ... Bc2.

11 Be2 Bf6 12 0-0 0-0-0 13 Ne5!

This strong move is the problem with Black's chosen set-up. White is clearly better, so Timur comes up with a highly imaginative way to muddy the waters.

13 ... c5!?

Objectively, 13 ... Bxe5 14 dxe5 Rhe8 was stronger, but White remains better after 15 g4 Bd7 16 f3 Nf6 17 Bf4!.



14 f3

The greedy 14 Nxf7? cxd4 15 Nxd8 Rxd8 is fine for Black. For instance, after 16 Bf4??, she has 16 ... g5! 17 Bg3 d3! 18 Bf3 Nxc3 19 fxc3 (or 19 hxc3 g4) 19 ... Bd4+! 20 Kh1 Bxb2 21 Rab1 Bxa3 22 Rb3 d2! 23 Rxa3 Re8! 24 Bd1 Re1 25 Raf3 Bc2 and Black wins in emphatic fashion.

14 ... Nd2 15 Rfd1

Not 15 Bxd2? Bxe5 and Black equalizes.

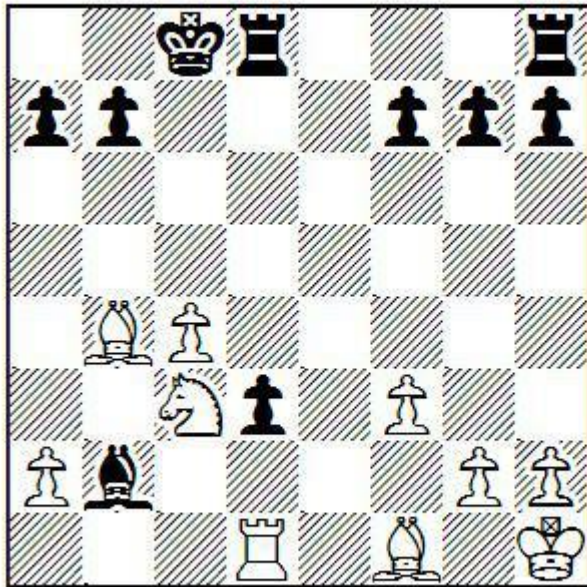
15 ... Nb1!

The only chance.

16 Raxb1

16 Nxb1?? Nc2! leads to a draw by perpetual check after 17 Nxf7 Nxe3 18 Nc3 Bxd4 19 Rdc1 Nc2+ 20 Kf1 Ne3+.

16 ... Bxb1 17 Nxb1 cxd4 18 Bd2! d3 19 Bf1 Bxe5 20 Bxb4 Bd4+ 21 Kh1 Bxb2 22 Nc3!



White has successfully navigated the tactical mêlée and finds himself with a decisive material advantage. David's technique is solid.

22 ... d2 23 Nd5 Bc1 24 Bxd2 Bxd2 25 Rxd2 Rhe8 26 Rd1 Rd6 27 Kg1 Ra6 28 Nc3 Rd8 29 Bd3 g6 30 Bc2 Rxd1+ 31 Bxd1 Rd6 32 Bb3 Rd2 33 Nd5 Rd3 34 Kf2 f5?? 35 Nf6??

I am a little sceptical of the official game record in my database around this point, because 35 Ke2 rather simply wins the rook.

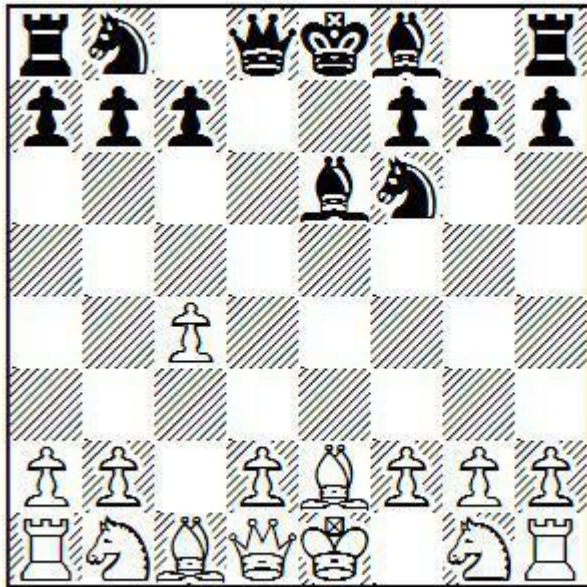
35 ... Rd2+ 36 Kg3 h5 37 h4 Kc7 38 Nd5+ Kd6 39 Nf4 Kc5 40 Nxc6 a5 41 Nf4 Kb4 42 c5 a4 43 Be6 Kxc5 44 Nxc5 1-0

Game 17

J.M.Degraeve-R.Ekstroem

European Championship, Ohrid 2001

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 dxe6 Bxe6 5 Be2



Avoiding 5 Nf3 Qe7! in this way is safe and sensible, but hardly critical. Black gains full compensation with natural development.

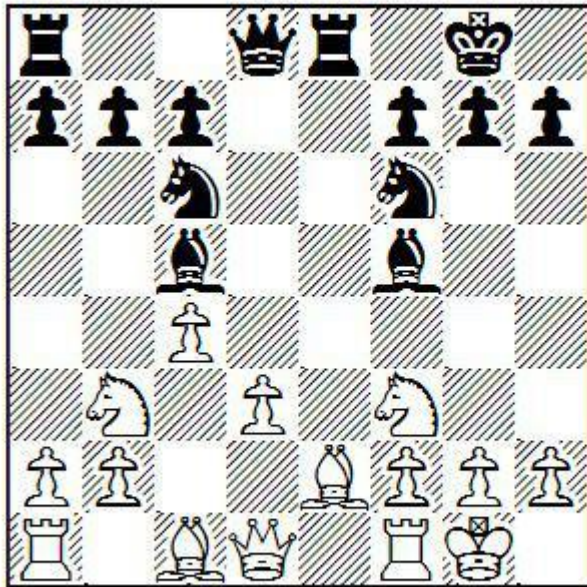
5 ... Nc6 6 Nf3 Bc5 7 0-0 0-0 8 d3 Re8 9 Nbd2

Again, White opts for a timid response, but the knight is heading for b3 where it will control the key d4-square. Instead, 9 Nc3 Bf5 creates ideas of ... Qd7, ... Rad8 and ... Nd4.

9 ... Bf5

Here 9 ... a5! 10 Nb3 Ba7 is logical. Then 11 d4 can be met by 11 ... a4!, while 11 a4 Nb4! 12 d4 Bf5 leaves White's queenside full of holes.

10 Nb3



10 ... Rxe2!

A nice move to play, if practically forced.

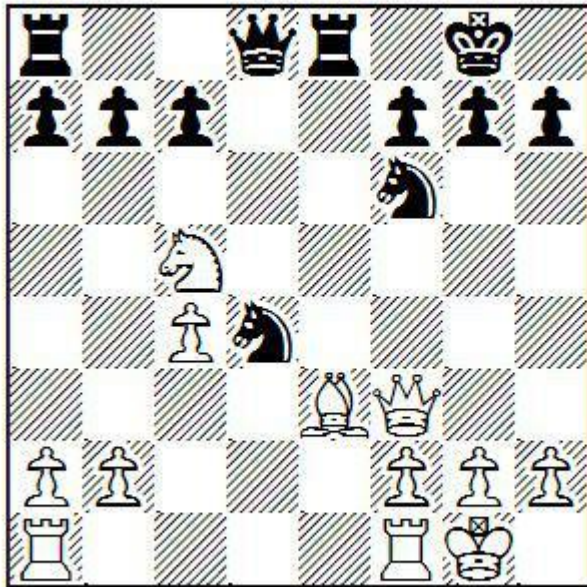
11 Nxc5! Re8 12 d4

12 Nxb7! was stronger, although White was understandably hesitant about further pawn-grabbing with such underdevelopment.

12 ... Bg4 13 Be3 Bxf3 14 Qxf3

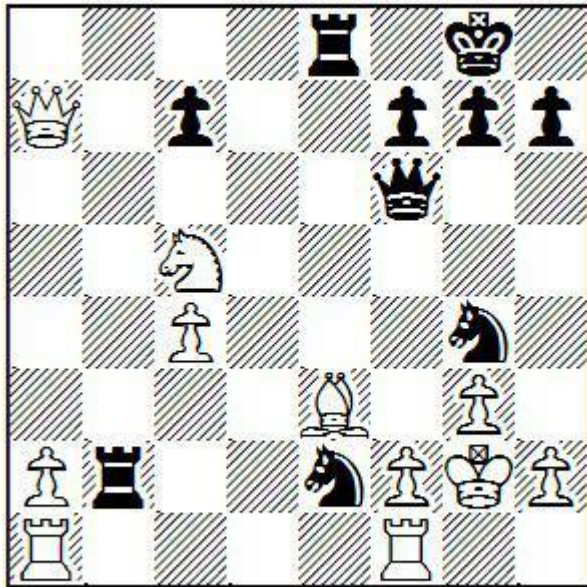
14 gxf3 b6 15 Nb3 Qd7! gives Black excellent chances against White's broken kingside: ... Ne7 is coming, followed by an assault by the deadly attacking combination of Black's queen and two knights.

14 ... Nxd4



Black's aggressive play has been rewarded by the recovery of the sacrificed pawn and, more importantly, the destruction of White's centre. At this point Degraeve should have been looking to minimize his disadvantage. Instead, he captures the poisoned b7-pawn on its second offering, to his great regret.

15 Qxb7? Rb8! 16 Qxa7 Ne2+ 17 Kh1 Ng4 18 g3 Qf6 19 Kg2 Rxb2!



This move springs echoes of Game 14 (Nabaty-Chatalbashev) from the Classical variation, and indeed, another 'black knights' tango' checkmate is imminent ...

20 Na4 Qc6+ 21 f3 Nf4+! 0-1

After 22 Kh1 Rxh2+ 23 Kg1 Nh3 mate, the black knights get the final say.

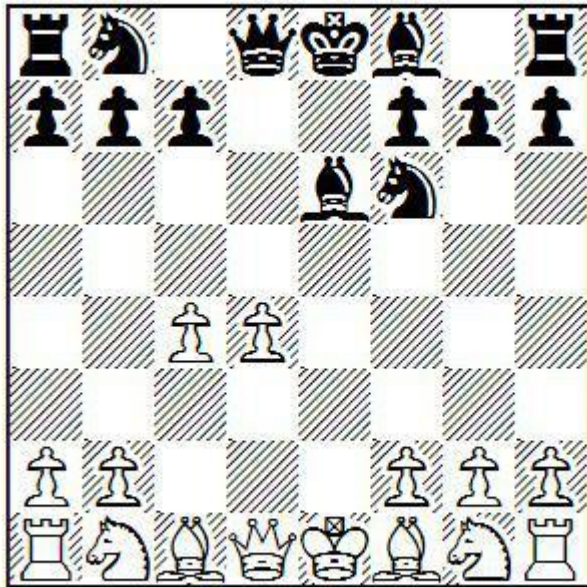
Game 18

An.Sokolov-J.Speelman

Madrid (rapid) 1988

This was an historically important encounter for the development of this variation, as well as adding some powerful Elo weight to the reputation of the gambit.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 dxe6 Bxe6 5 d4?!



Common, but weak. After all, if White could play this without fear of retribution, Black's gambit would hardly be playable at all!

5 ... Bb4+!

Black must respond energetically.

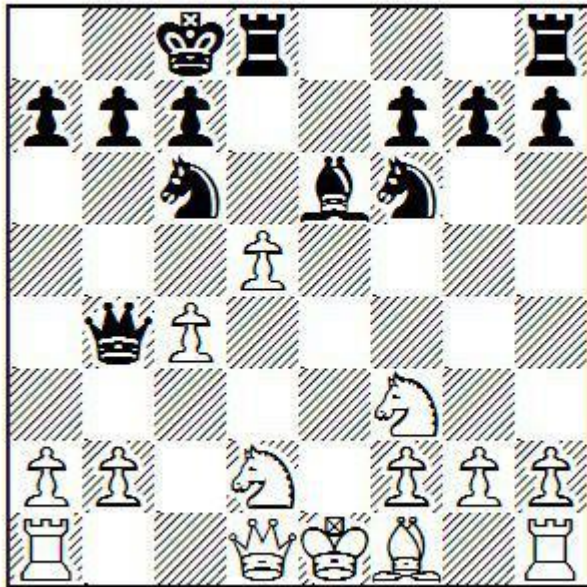
6 Bd2 Qe7 7 Bxb4 Qxb4+ 8 Nd2

If 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Nc3 0-0-0 10 d5, the novelty 10 ... Ne5!! favours Black.

8 ... Nc6!

Black must have no fear in the Icelandic, and be willing to sacrifice a piece on d5 in several lines.

9 Ngf3 0-0-0 10 d5



10 ... Bg4?

This works out for Speelman in the game, but Black could have finished the contest immediately: 10 ... Nxd5!! 11 cxd5 Bxd5 is extremely powerful, intending ... Bxf3, ... Rhe8, and a likely occupation of d4 by the knight. Black's position is crushing; e.g. 12 Be2 Bxf3 13 gxf3 Rhe8 and wins.

11 Be2?

Returning the favour. 11 dxc6! Rhe8+ 12 Be2 Nh5! gives Black dangerous play for the piece, but at least the game continues. For example, 13 0-0 Nf4 14 Re1 Rxe2 15 Rxe2 Bxf3 16 gxf3 bxc6 17 Re4 Rxd2 18 Qf1 Ne6 with excellent compensation for the exchange.

11 ... Bxf3! 12 Bxf3 Rhe8+ 13 Kf1 Nd4

The pawn on b2 could also have been taken, but Speelman is hunting bigger fish.

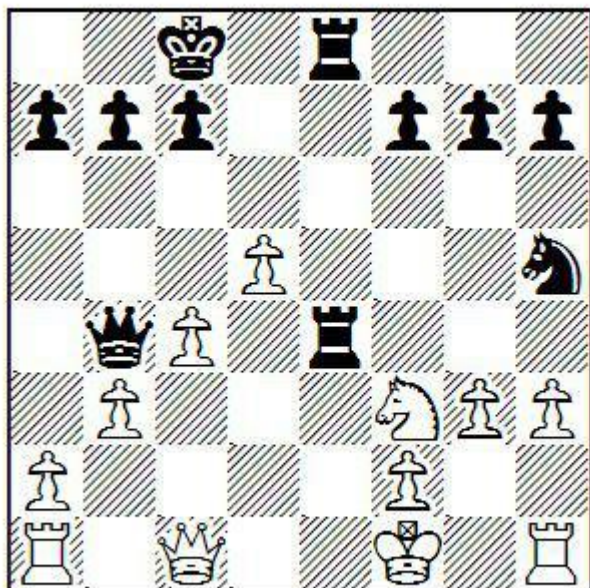
14 Qc1 Nxf3 15 Nxf3 Re4

Here 15 ... b5! would have fatally demolished the last bastions of White's central structure.

16 b3 Rde8 17 h3 Nh5!?

The most aggressive option, although 17 ... b5! would again have left Black with a clear advantage.

18 g3



18 ... Nxg3+!

Black's second knight sacrifice, and we haven't even reached move twenty!

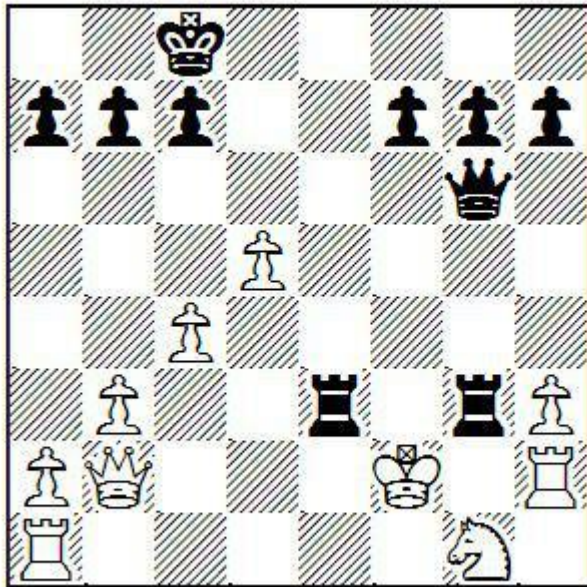
19 fxg3 Re3 20 Ng1?

Black's attack certainly looks menacing after 20 Kg2 Re2+, but in the cold light of engine analysis it appears that White can survive: 21 Kf1 Qb6 22 Rh2! Rxh2 (22 ... Qf6 23 Rf2!! R8e3 24 Qd1 holds on) 23 Nxh2 Qf6+ 24 Kg2 Re2+ 25 Kh1 Qe5 26 Qf1! and Black's attack yields no more than a draw.

20 ... Qd6!

The queen makes a deadly switch to the kingside. White's position is indefensible.

21 Rh2 Rxg3! 22 Qb2 Qg6 23 Kf2 Ree3!



Total domination.

24 Ne2 Rg3+ 25 Ke1 Qg1+ 26 Kd2 Qxh2 27 Re1 Qf2 0-1

Theory

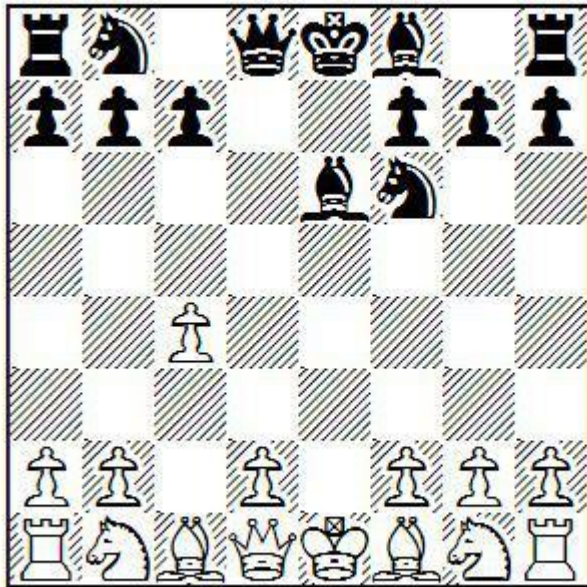
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 dxe6

Other moves:

a) 4 Qa4+?! Bd7 5 Qb3 exd5 6 cxd5 Na6! gives Black excellent compensation.

b) 4 d4 invites another quirky transposition, this time to a variation of the Exchange French. Black has a number of promising lines that secure excellent chances; my personal preference is 4 ... exd5 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Be2 dxc4 8 Bxc4 Bg4 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Be3 and now 10 ... Qd6!? with an equal game, as first played by a young Magnus Carlsen (aged 11), in Ro.Sander-Ma.Carlsen, Bergen 2002.

4 ... Bxe6



We are already at an important junction:

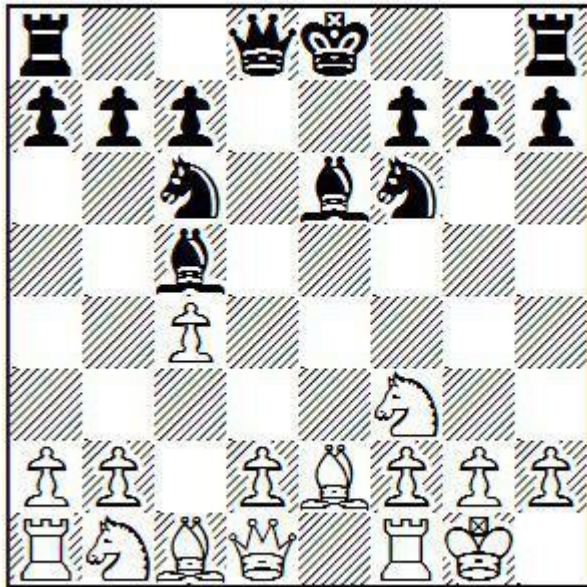
A: 5 d4?!

B: 5 Nf3!

Instead:

a) 5 Nc3?! is not a great move to begin with, and 5 ... Nc6 6 Nf3 Qe7! 7 g3?? is even worse! White resigned this seven-move gem without waiting for ... Bg4+ or ... Bd5+ in *J_Dime* (2180)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013. But Black regains her pawn on c4 in any case, since 7 Qe2? Nb4! 8 d4 Bf5 is better for Black.

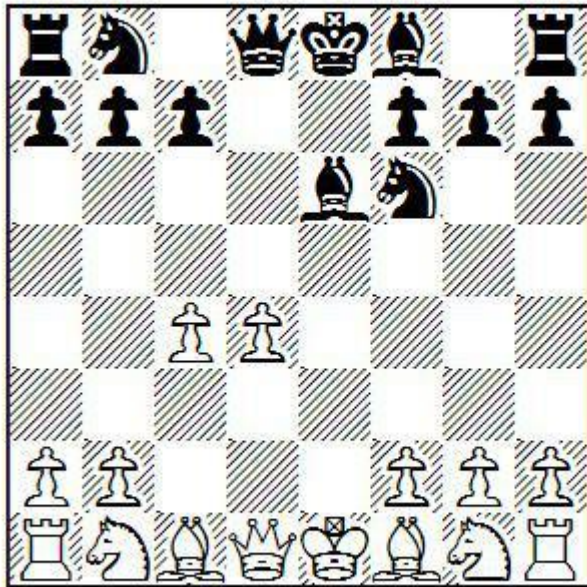
b) 5 Be2 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bc5! gives Black good compensation. The combination of White's slow development and weaknesses on the semi-open d-file offer Black plenty of play. Black should simply pile up on White's backward d-pawn. Play might continue 7 0-0 and then:



a) 7 ... 0-0! 8 d3 (or 8 Nc3 Re8 9 d3 Bf5 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4 Nd4 with a balanced game) 8 ... Re8 9 Nbd2 a5! (9 ... Bf5 was Game 17, Degraeve-Ekstroem) 10 Nb3 Ba7 11 a4 (or 11 d4 a4!) 11 ... Nb4! 12 d4 Bf5 and Black has a strong initiative for the pawn.

b) 7 ... Qd7!? is more ambitious, although in my opinion Black's compensation is of a more positional nature, and thus queenside castling is perhaps unnecessarily risky: 8 d3 0-0-0 9 Nbd2 Bf5?! 10 Nb3 Bd4 11 Nbx d4 Nx d4 12 Nx d4 Qx d4 13 Be3 Qxb2 14 Rb1 Qa3 15 Qb3?! Qxb3 16 Rxb3 Rhe8 was acceptable for Black in A.Onischuk-Art.Minasian, European Team Championship, Batumi 1999, but 15 Rb3! would have been very dangerous.

A: 5 d4?!



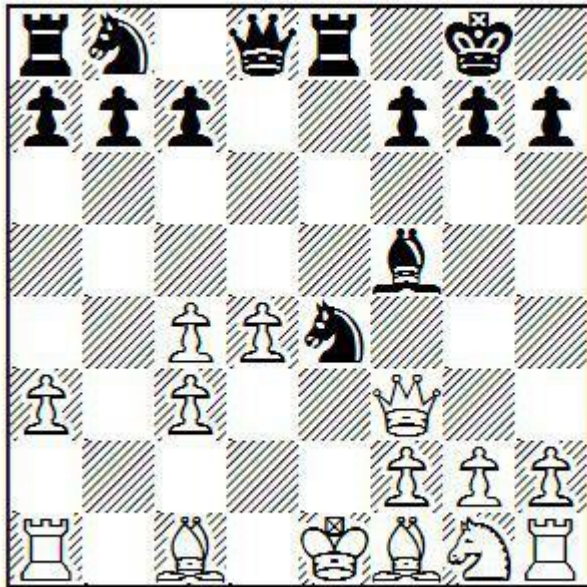
The most ambitious, “I don’t believe you”, counter to Black’s gambit. White seeks to squeeze the maximum out of her position, taking control of the centre. However, this attempted refutation backfires.

5 ... Bb4+!

White is attempting to steamroll Black through the centre, so the gambiteer must strike quickly.

6 Bd2

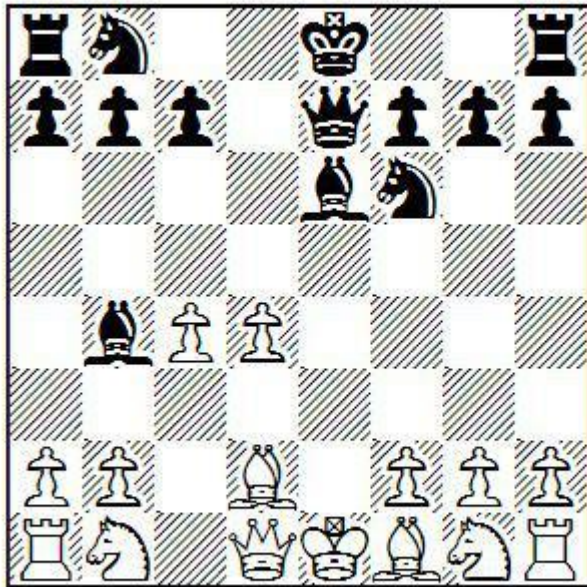
If 6 Nc3 then 6 ... Ne4! is very strong: 7 Qd3 (7 Bd2? Qxd4 8 Nxe4 Qxe4+ is already winning for Black, A.Karacsony-At.Kiss, Veszprem 1995) 7 ... Bf5! 8 a3 (8 Bd2?! 0-0! is crushing; e.g. 9 Nge2 Re8 10 Nxe4 Bxe4 11 Qg3 Bxd2+ 12 Kxd2 Nc6 13 Kc3 Nxd4!! 14 Nxd4 c5 led to a quick mate in H.Yasin-I.Koc, Turkish Team Championship 2008) 8 ... Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 0-0 10 Qf3 Re8.



White's position is in tatters with only a queen to represent her development, and she will soon come under a crushing attack. One violent example continued 11 Be3 Qd7 12 h3 Nxc3 13 Qxb7? Nc6 14 Qb3 Qxd4 15 Rc1 Rxe3+!! 16 fxe3 Qh4+ 17 Kd2 Ne4+ 0-1 R.Dicu-C.Florescu, Rumanian Team Championship 2011.

6 ... Qe7

6 ... Bxd2+ is slightly weaker, though not without venom. If you wish to investigate this move, I would recommend the as-yet unplayed sacrificial line 7 Qxd2 Qe7 8 Qe3 0-0 9 d5 Ng4! 10 Qe2 Re8! 11 dxe6 Qf6 12 Qf3 Qxe6+ 13 Be2 Nc6 with a dangerous attack for the piece.



7 Bxb4

The most popular move, though perhaps not the best:

a) 7 Qe2? seems plausible and can arise by transposition from line B1, but 7 ... Nc6 8 Nf3 0-0-0! 9 d5 Rhe8!! gives Black an overwhelming attack: 10 dxe6 (similarly, both 10 dxc6 Qc5! and 10 Nc3 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Qc5! open the e-file to decisive effect) 10 ... Qc5 11 Nc3 (or 11 g3 Qf5! and wins) 11 ... Rxd2!! 12 Qxd2 Rxe6+ 13 Kd1 (13 Be2 Ne4! wins on the spot) 13 ... Bxc3 14 Qxc3 Ne4 15 Qxg7 Nxf2+ 16 Kc1 Qe3+ 17 Kb1 was T.Nagley-P.Corbat, correspondence 2000, and now, somewhat surprisingly for a correspondence game, Black missed a win with 17 ... Qe4+! 18 Kc1 Nxe1 19 b3 Nf2 20 Kb2 Rd6 with a crushing attack.

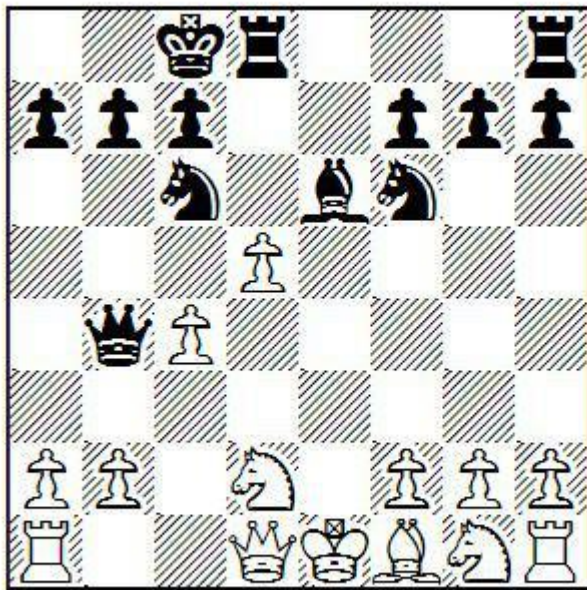
b) 7 Be2 is White's safest option: 7 ... Ne4! (7 ... Bxc4? 8 Qa4+ Nc6 9 Bxb4! wins for White) 8 Bxb4 (8 d5? Qc5! 9 Qa4+ Nc6! gives Black a crushing attack, but both 8 Nf3 Nxd2 9 Nbxg2 Bxc4 and 8 a3 Nxd2 9 Nxd2 Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Bxc4 offer equal chances) 8 ... Qxb4+ 9 Nd2 (after 9 Nc3 Nxc3 10 Qd2 Nd5! 11 cxd5 Qxd2+ 12 Kxd2 Bxd5, Black has a small advantage) 9 ... Bxc4 10 Bxc4 Nxd2 11 Bxf7+! (11 Qxd2 Qxc4 slightly favours Black, C.Lhagvasuren-F.Berend, Moscow Olympiad 1994) 11 ... Kxf7 12 Qxd2 Re8+ 13 Ne2 Nc6 14 Qxb4 Nxb4 15 Kd2 Re7 with a level endgame.

7 ... Qxb4+ 8 Qd2

It seems that White will have time to unravel, as Black looks to have been prevented from developing with ... Nc6 on account of a d4-d5 pawn fork. However, we will see that after both this and White's other eighth-move alternatives, the pawn fork is not to be feared. In particular, you will notice the spectacular ... Nxd5 blow appearing again and again. Despite appearances, White's position is on the verge of collapsing.

a) 8 Nc3? Bxc4 is just good for Black.

b) 8 Nd2 is objectively White's best chance, though she is still a long way from escaping the worst: 8 ... Nc6! 9 d5 (9 Ngf3 0-0-0 10 d5 was Game 18, Sokolov-Speelman, and here Black could have ended the game immediately with the devastating 10 ... Nxd5!! 11 cxd5 Bxd5 12 Be2 Bxf3 13 gxf3 Rhe8, winning) 9 ... 0-0-0! with a powerful attack.



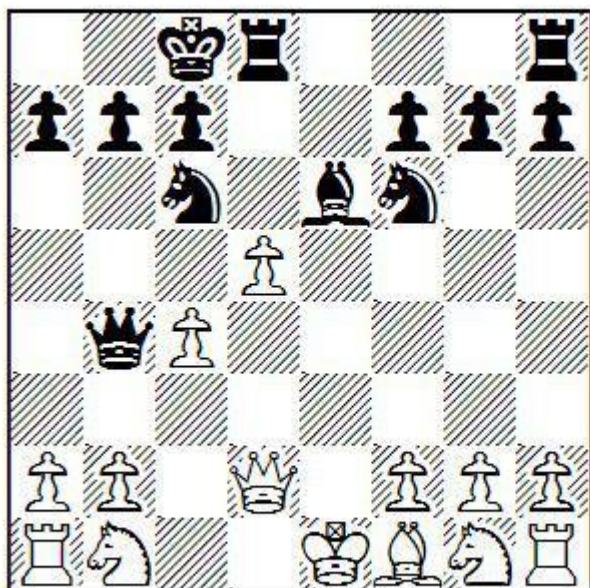
For example: 10 Qb3! (not 10 dxe6? Ne4 11 a3 Qxb2! or 10 dxc6? Ne4! 11 cxb7+ Kb8 12 Ngf3 Nxd2 13 Nxd2 Rhe8 and wins; while 10 Ngf3? transposes to Sokolov-Speelman, allowing 10 ... Nxd5!! 11 cxd5 Bxd5 etc) 10 ... Nxd5 (forcing a draw; alternatively, 10 ... Bg4!? 11 f3! Rhe8+ 12 Be2 Bf5 offers dangerous play) 11 cxd5 Bxd5 12

Qxb4 Nxb4 13 0-0-0 Nxa2+ 14 Kc2 Nb4+ 15 Kc3 Na2+ with perpetual check.

8 ... Nc6 9 d5

Here 9 Nc3? was *Inspirational Game #2* (Kuijf-Hodgson), where 9 ... Bxc4! was simple and strong; and 9 Qxb4? Nxb4 10 Na3 0-0-0 11 d5 Bf5! will see White getting slaughtered on the central files after ... Rhe8 and ... c7-c6.

9 ... 0-0-0!



10 Nc3

The best chance, although Black is better whatever. Other moves quickly spell disaster:

a) 10 Nf3? Rhe8 11 Be2 (not 11 Qxb4? Bxd5+ 12 Be2 Bxf3! and wins) 11 ... Bxd5 12 cxd5 Nxd5 (another strong sacrifice on d5) 13 Qxb4 Ncxb4 14 Na3 Nf4 15 Ng1 Re7 16 Kf1 Nxe2 17 Nxe2 Rd2 with a clear advantage to Black.

b) 10 a3? Qe7! 11 Be2 Nxd5! 12 cxd5 Bxd5 13 Qf4 g5! 14 Qg3 Nd4 and Black wins.

c) 10 Qxb4? Nxb4 11 Na3 Bf5 is again crushing.

d) 10 Be2?! Nxd5! 11 cxd5 Bxd5 12 f3 Qb6! with a clear advantage.

After the text, Black has tried six moves with good results, but so far the best continuation remains untested:

10 ... Ne5!!

Instead:

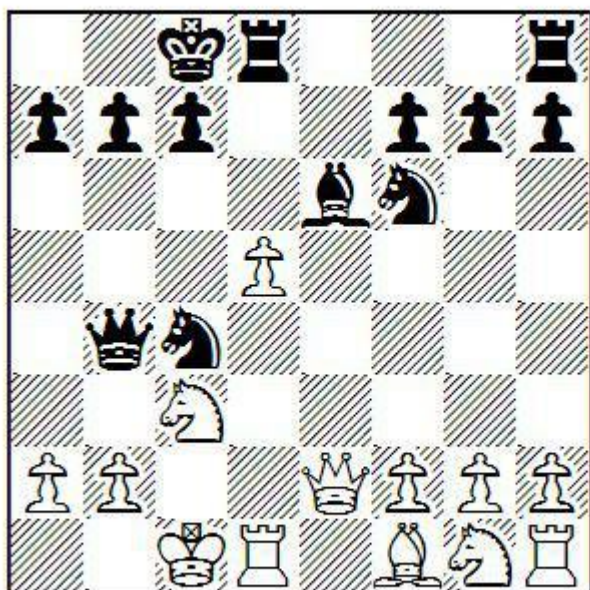
a) 10 ... Bg4!? 11 f3 Rhe8+ 12 Be2 Bf5 13 0-0-0 Na5 is Kuijf-Hodgson again.

b) 10 ... Na5 11 Nd1 Qa4 12 Nc3 Qb4 led to a quick draw in L.Shytaj-K.Landa, Reggio Emilia 2006/07.

11 0-0-0

11 b3 c6! demolishes White's centre, to Black's advantage.

11 ... Nxc4 12 Qe2



Apparently winning a piece thanks to the check on g4, but Black has other ideas.

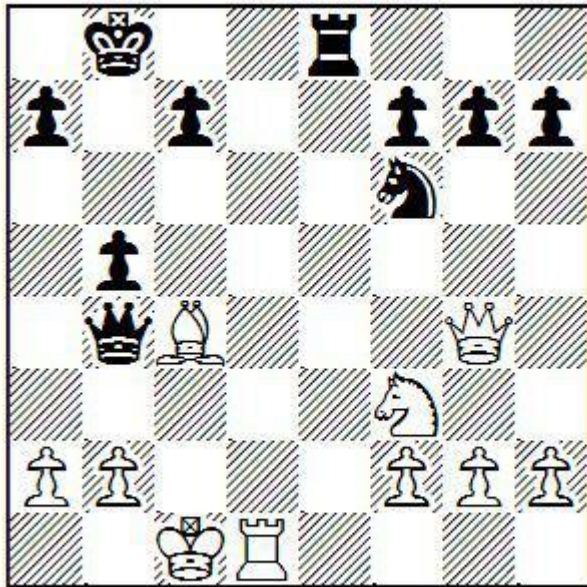
12 ... Bxd5!

12 ... Rxd5 13 Nxd5 Bxd5 14 a3 Nxa3 15 bxa3 Qxa3+ 16 Qb2 Qc5+ 17 Qc2 Qa3+ leads to a draw, but no more than that.

13 Nxd5 Rxd5 14 Rxd5 Nxd5 15 Qg4+ Kb8 16 Bxc4

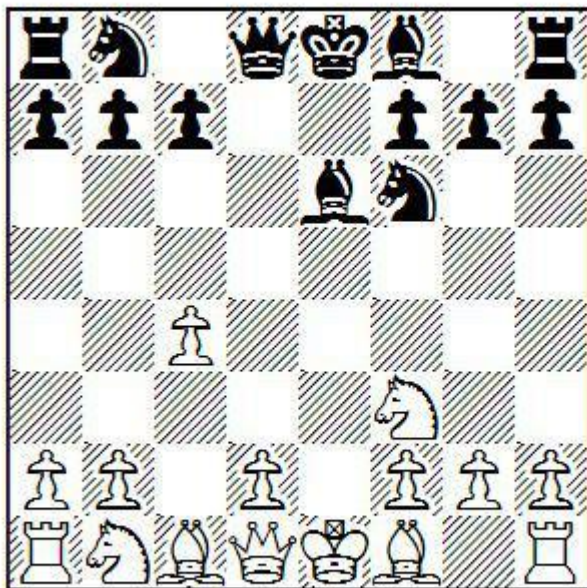
Not 16 Qxc4? Qe1+ 17 Kc2 Qxf2+ 18 Kb3 Rd8 with a decisive attack.

16 ... Re8! 17 Nf3 b5! 18 Rd1 Nf6



Black wins her piece back, keeping a clear advantage.

B: 5 Nf3!



As we have seen, Black can confidently press for an advantage after 5 d4?!, as well as against lesser alternatives. The text is White's main move, and also clearly the best. White delays d2-d4 for

the moment, instead opting to bring herself one move closer to kingside castling.

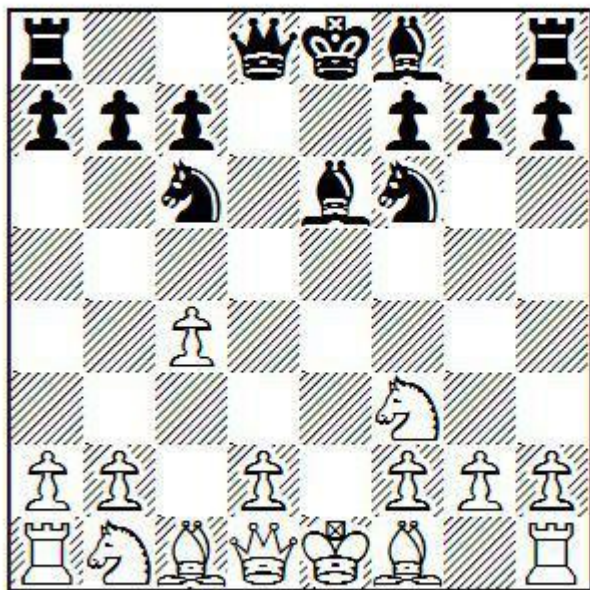
An indication of the frailty of Black's position is that players have tried no fewer than twelve different moves from the diagram. Of these, we will examine three. We will begin with the most popular try, 5 ... Nc6, as it is instructive to see why this natural developing move is bad. We will then take a quick look at the extremely rare 5 ... c5!?, before finally moving on to Black's best move 5 ... Qe7!. Feel free to skip ahead to this line if you are in a hurry, though again I must stress that taking the time to soak in the ideas from less critical alternatives is a valuable skill.

B1: 5 ... Nc6

B2: 5 ... c5!?

B3: 5 ... Qe7!

B1: 5 ... Nc6



6 d4!

Other moves have been covered already: 6 Be2 Bc5! via 5 Be2 (where Black's compensation is sufficient) and 6 Nc3?! Qe7! via 5 Nc3?!.

6 ... Bb4+

Alternatively, 6 ... Qe7 7 Qe2! transposes directly to line B3, whereas 7 Be3 0-0-0 8 Nbd2 g5! is not at all clear, as 9 d5?! Bxd5! 10 cxd5 Nxd5 is dangerous for White.

7 Nc3!

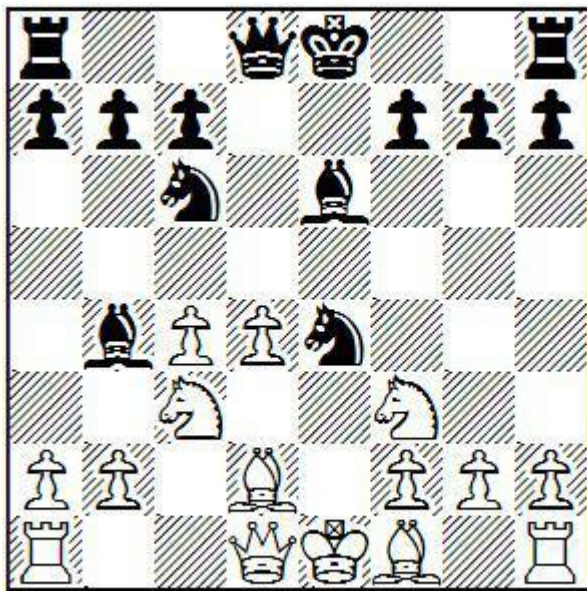
Compared with 5 d4?! Bb4+, here the insertion of Nf3 and ... Nc6 is definitely in White's favour. Instead, the natural 7 Bd2? Qe7 8 Qe2 runs into 8 ... 0-0-0! 9 d5 Rhe8!! with a deadly attack, which was examined in the notes to line A (see 7 Qe2? Nc6 8 Nf3 0-0-0! etc).

7 ... Ne4!?

The best try. After 7 ... 0-0? 8 d5 Bxd5 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Bd2 Re8+ 11 Be2, Black doesn't have enough for the piece; while 7 ... Qe7?! 8 Be3! only helps White's development.

8 Bd2!

8 d5?! Qf6! 9 Bd2 Bxc3 10 bxc3 0-0-0! gives Black the initiative.



Without the insertion of Nf3 and ... Nc6, Black can gain the advantage by playing ... Qxd4. Here, that is of course impossible, which makes all the difference.

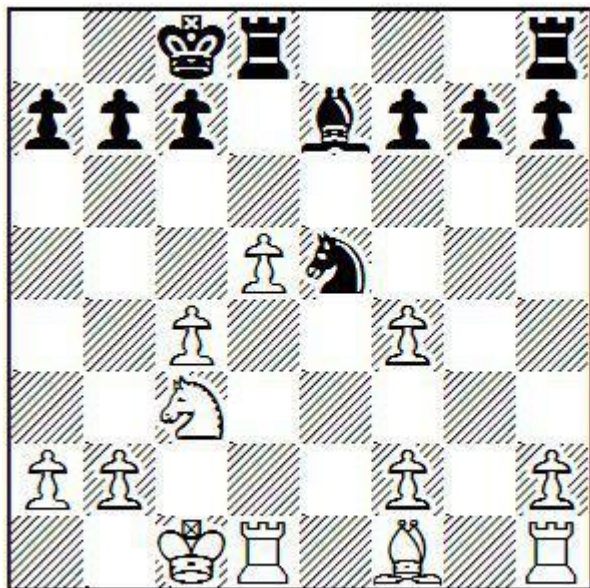
8 ... Nxd2 9 Qxd2 Bg4 10 Qe3+!

This check throws out Black's rhythm just in time to prevent the arrival of her rooks in the centre.

10 ... Qe7

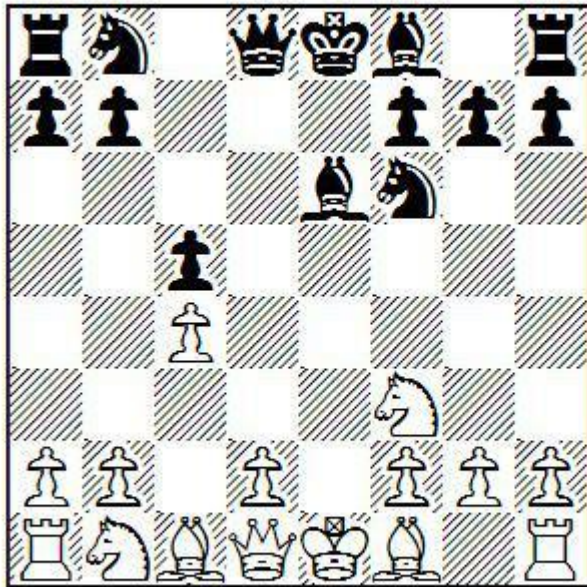
A sad necessity. 10 ... Be7 11 d5 Nb4 12 0-0-0 clearly favours White.

11 Qxe7+ Bxe7 12 0-0-0 0-0-0 13 d5! Bxf3 14 gxf3 Ne5 15 f4



White has managed to keep her extra pawn, and although converting the win will be problematic, she has all the chances in the endgame.

B2: 5 ... c5!?



This move's lack of popularity is understandable, as if anything it seems to limit Black's chances of activity by taking c5 away from her minor pieces. However, Black seeks compensation of a more position nature, aiming to secure the d4-square and with it the permanency of White's backward d-pawn.

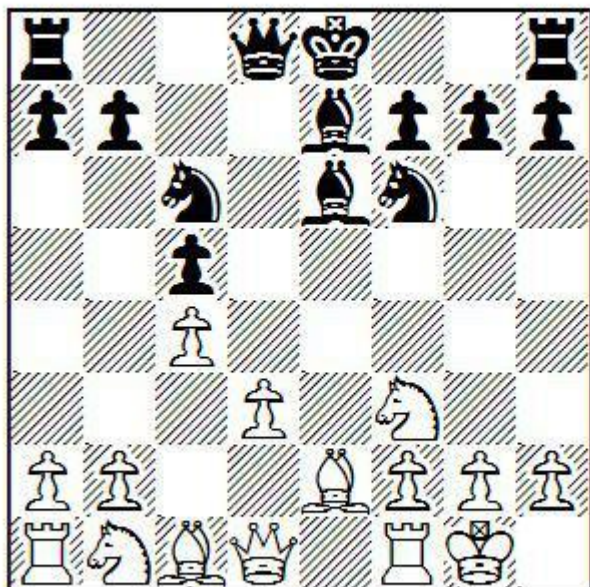
5 ... c5 is not a bad move, and certainly better than the most popular continuation 5 ... Nc6. On the other hand, the position is less dynamic and White has far fewer ways to go wrong than against 5 ... Nc6 or 5 ... Qe7. Still, it contains decent surprise value and leads to underexplored positions with plenty of opportunities for the stronger player to outplay her opponent.

6 Be2

6 d4?! is premature: 6 ... cxd4 7 Nxd4 (7 Qxd4 Nc6! is fine for Black) 7 ... Bc5! 8 Be3 (8 Nxe6? runs into 8 ... Bxf2+! 9 Ke2 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 fxe6 with advantage to Black) 8 ... Ng4 9 Nxe6 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 Bxe3 (B.Laurent-V.Okhotnik, Agneaux 2006) 11 Nxg7+ Kf8 12 fxe3 Kxg7 13 Ke1 Re8! and Black has compensation that is 'almost sufficient' for the pawns. White will be left with a slightly more pleasant endgame once e3 drops off, but a draw is still the most likely result.

6 ... Nc6 7 0-0 Be7 8 d3

8 Nc3 is a more accurate move-order, intending to meet 8 ... Qc7? with 9 d4!.



8 ... 0-0

Alternatively:

a) 8 ... Qb6 9 Nc3 Rd8 10 b3 Bf5 11 Bf4 0-0 12 Qd2? was seen in L.Psakhis-A.Nadanian, Yerevan Olympiad 1996, where Black missed 12 ... Ne4! 13 Nxe4 Bxe4 with excellent compensation.

b) 8 ... Qc7! is interesting, intending ... Rd8, or if 9 d4 then 9 ... cxd4 10 Nxd4 0-0-0 11 Nxe6 fxe6 is unclear; ... Nd4 is coming.

9 Nc3!

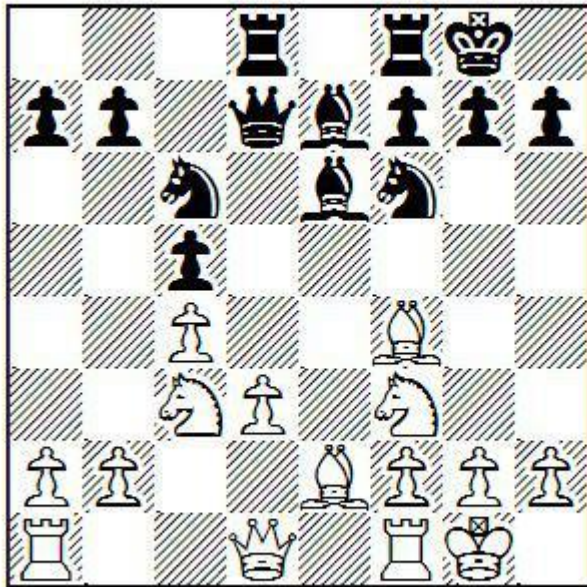
Instead, 9 Nbd2?! was Y.Solodovnichenko-F.Bentivegna, Cutro 2008, when Black should play 9 ... Bf5! 10 Nb3 Qc7! with ... Rad8 to follow; Black is not worse.

9 ... Qd7

9 ... Qb8!? 10 b3 a6 11 Bb2 Rd8 12 Qd2 Ra7!? 13 Nd1 b6 14 Ne3 Nh5 15 g3 Bf6 16 Rad1 Rad7 was the interesting course of a deep engine battle I ran, *Houdini 4 Pro-Houdini 4 Pro*, Shootout 2014.

10 Bf4 Rad8

After 10 ... Bd6!? 11 Bg5! Ng4 12 Ne4!, White has a pleasant advantage. *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.



Black has developed naturally, controlling d4 and keeping White's forces passive. However, White is still a pawn ahead and in no immediate danger. Although Black has done reasonably well in neutralizing White's advantage in practice, objectively her compensation cannot be fully sufficient for the pawn. Play has continued:

a) 11 Re1 Bg4?! (11 ... Qc8! is better) 12 Ne5! Nxe5 13 Bxe5 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 with a clear advantage to White, D.Stets-K.Zolnierowicz, Nowy Sacz 2005.

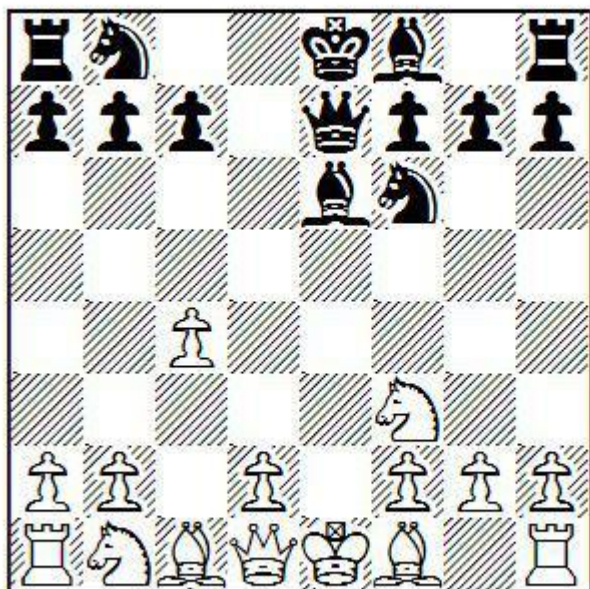
b) 11 Qa4 Bg4 12 Rad1 Rfe8 13 Rfe1 Bd6! 14 Be3? (of course 14 Bxd6 was called for, and after 14 ... Qxd6 15 h3 Bh5 16 Ng5!, White remains on top) 14 ... Qf5! 15 Nd5?, J.K.Shaw-L.Salai, Yerevan Olympiad 1996, and here the aggressive 15 ... Qh5! would have been very good for Black.

c) 11 Qd2 Qc8! 12 b3 Bf5 13 Rfd1 (13 Rad1! Ne4 14 Nxe4 Bxe4 15 Ne5! is better for White) 13 ... Ne4!, when a draw was agreed in K.Sychev-M.Krylov, Moscow 2011, although after 14 Nxe4 Bxe4 15 Ne5! Bd6 16 Nxc6 Bxc6, White could have kept an edge by returning the pawn with 17 b4!.

d) 11 Ne5! Nxe5 12 Bxe5 Ng4 13 Bf4 Qd4?! (13 ... Bf6!?) 14 Qd2?! (here 14 Bxg4! Qxf4 15 Bxe6 fxe6 16 Qe2 gives White a clear

advantage) 14 ... Bd6 15 Bxd6 Qxd6 16 Bxg4 Bxg4 17 Qg5 and White had a small but stable advantage, R.Skytte-R.Sluka, Olomouc 2006.

B3: 5 ... Qe7!



The modern way to play the Icelandic Gambit. Black figures that the awkwardness of the mutual queen interpositioning is felt worse by White, who will now have to give up hopes of kingside castling in order to keep her extra pawn. On the other hand, the immobilization of Black's dark-squared bishop is no less significant, as d4 can no longer be met by ... Bb4+.

6 Qe2

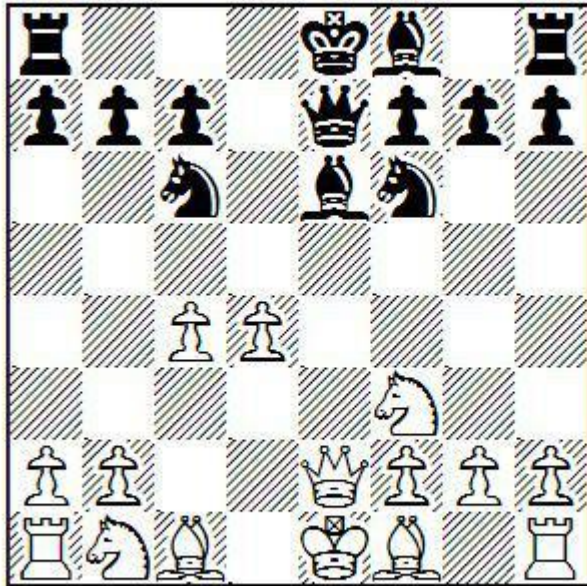
6 Be2?! Bxc4!, as in C.Sandipan-D.Smerdon, World Junior Championships, Goa 2002 (and many other games), shouldn't worry Black at all.

6 ... Nc6

The unplayed 6 ... c5!? is worthy of attention, but after 7 d4! (7 Nc3?! Nc6 8 d3 Rd8 with sufficient compensation due to White's weaknesses on d3 and d4) 7 ... cxd4 8 Nxd4 Nc6! 9 Nxe6 (9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Nc3 0-0-0 is less clear) 9 ... fxe6 10 Be3, White should slowly unravel, leaving her a sound pawn to the good.

7 d4

A key tabiya for the success of Iceland's finest contribution to opening theory. Black has three plausible continuations. The most aggressive option, 7 ... 0-0-0?, simply doesn't work, although it is good fun and I have tried it myself from time to time. 7 ... Bg4 is considered Black's best option in most theoretical texts, but the rare 7 ... Bf5! is definitely the pick of the bunch.

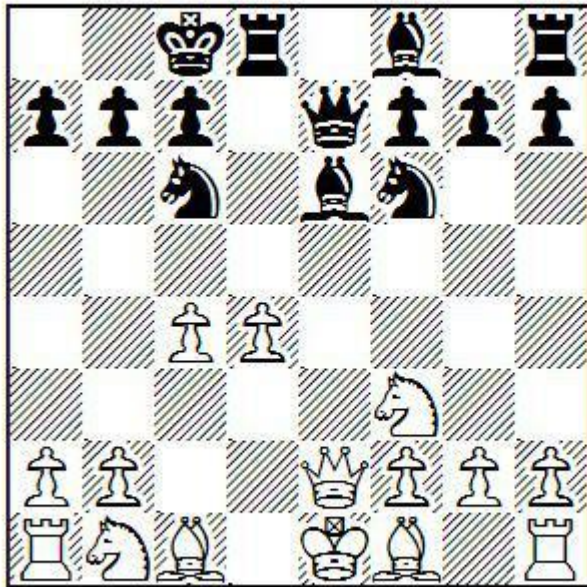


B31: 7 ... 0-0-0?

B32: 7 ... Bg4

B33: 7 ... Bf5!

B31: 7 ... 0-0-0?



8 d5 Qb4+

The novelty 8 ... Nxd5! is better, but the careful 9 cxd5 Bxd5 10 Qxe7 Bxe7 11 Nc3! Nb4 12 Nxd5 Rxd5 13 Rb1! still gives White a winning position.

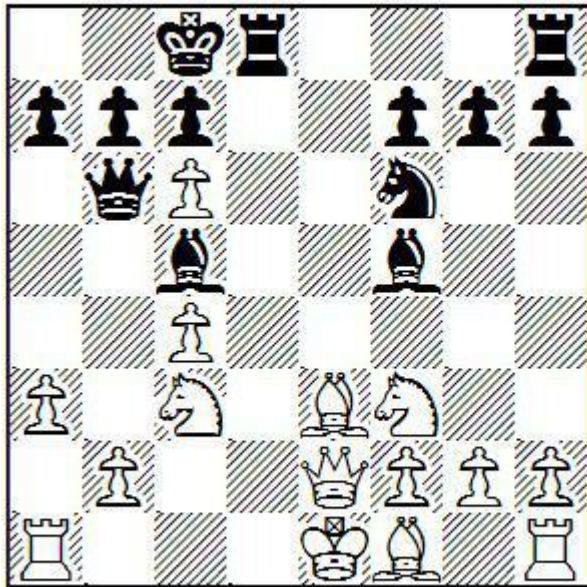
9 Nc3 Bf5

Unfortunately for Black, the piece can safely be captured, though White does need to find a couple more accurate moves to avoid the tricks.

10 dxc6!

10 a3?! can be met by 10 ... Qa5, rather than 10 ... Qb3?! 11 dxc6 Bc5 12 cxb7+ Qxb7 13 Nd5! and White has a won game, L.Webb-D.Smerdon, British League 2013.

10 ... Bc5 11 a3! Qb6 12 Be3



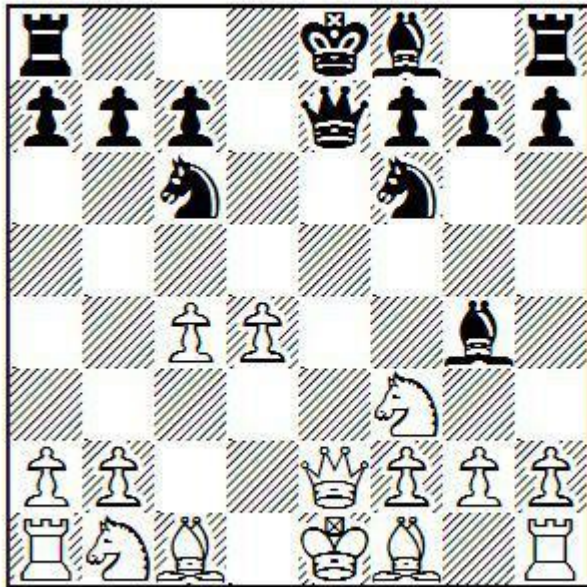
12 ... Rhe8

Or if 12 ... Bxe3 13 fxe3 Bd3, as in J.Sveinsson-P.Corbat, correspondence 2000, then 14 Na4! Qxc6 15 Ne5 wins.

13 Rd1! Bxe3 14 fxe3 Rxe3 15 cxb7+ Kxb7 16 Rxd8 Rxe2+ 17 Bxe2 Qxb2 18 Nd1! Qxa3 19 0-0

White has an overwhelming material advantage.

B32: 7 ... Bg4

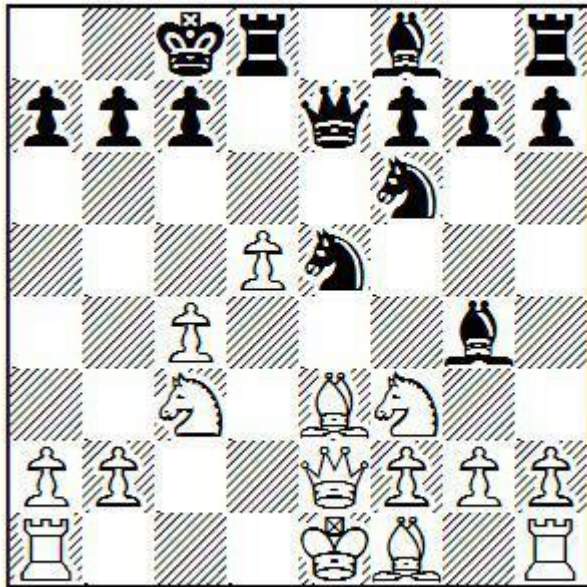


This move offers Black reasonable chances and can be difficult to meet in practice, as White does not find relief after an immediate exchange of queens.

8 Be3

8 Qxe7+?! Bxe7 9 Be3 0-0-0 10 Nbd2 Nb4 11 Kd1 Bf5! gives Black ongoing pressure for the pawn; while after 8 d5?! Bxf3 9 gxf3 Nd4 10 Qxe7+ Bxe7, Black regains her pawn with a slightly more pleasant endgame.

8 ... 0-0-0 9 d5 Ne5 10 Nc3

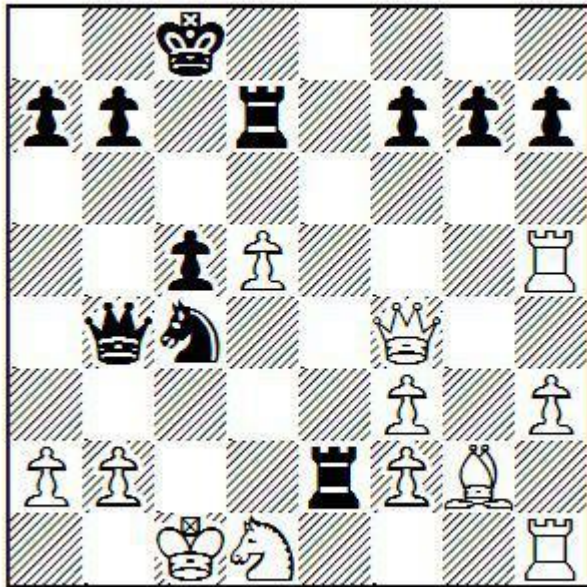


10 ... Nfd7

10 ... Qb4 is popular, but the queen can't really cause too much damage by herself. For example, 11 0-0-0 Qa5 (11 ... Bh5 allows White to launch a surprising offensive with 12 Bxa7! Nxf3 13 gxf3 b6 14 c5!! Bxc5 15 Qa6+ Kd7 16 Bc4! with a decisive attack) 12 h3 Bxf3 13 gxf3 Bb4 14 Bd4 was clearly better for White in C.Koepke-R.Tleptsok, Helsingor 2014.

11 0-0-0!

11 h3?! was played against me in one of my first outings for our system. Indulge me while I show off the cute finish: 11 ... Nxf3+ 12 gxf3 Bh5 13 0-0-0 Ne5 14 Bg2 Qb4 15 Rd4 Bc5 16 Rh4?! Bxe3+ 17 Qxe3 Rhe8! (Black's attack is raging) 18 Rxh5 Nxc4 19 Qd4 c5 20 Qg4+ Rd7 21 Nd1? Re2 22 Qf4

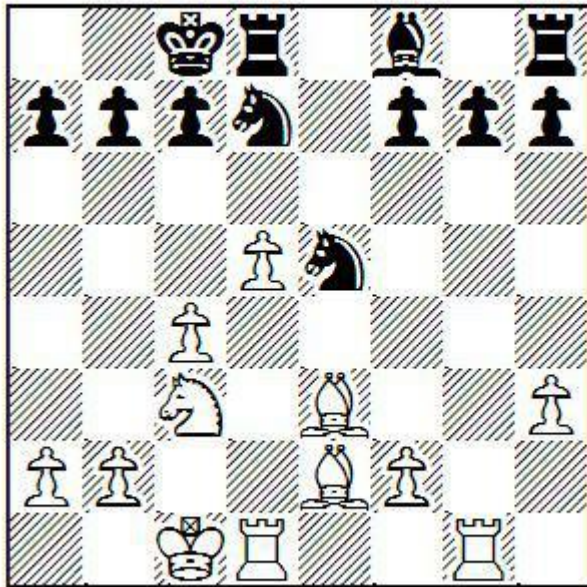


22 ... Na3!! 23 Qf5 (or 23 Qxb4 Rc2 mate) 23 ... Qd2 mate,
S.Kosmo-D.Smerdon, World Junior Championships, Goa 2002.

11 ... Qf6 12 h3 Bxf3

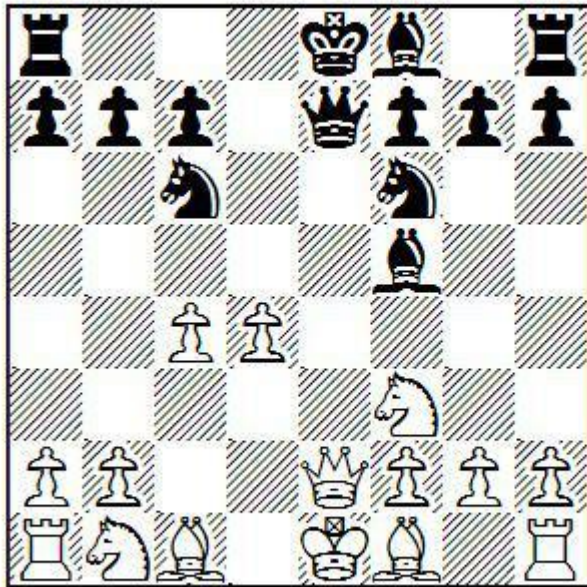
12 ... Bh5 13 g4 Nxf3 14 gxh5 is worse, and 14 ... Re8? 15 d6!
Bxd6 16 h4! was a disaster for Black in D.Lamson-D.Ray,
correspondence 2010.

13 gxf3 Qxf3 14 Qxf3 Nxf3 15 Be2 Nfe5 16 Rhg1



This is the best Black can hope for if White manages to avoid the tricks and find all the right moves. The endgame is clearly better for White, though Black has an active knight and play on the dark squares, so there remain drawing chances. From a practical perspective, it's up to you in each game to decide whether the probability of your opponent falling for one of the traps before reaching this position can justify you choosing to employ this dubious line.

B33: 7 ... Bf5!



An extremely rare move in practice, but it offers Black the best chances. I had been waiting for several years for an opponent to allow me to unleash my analysis on this move, when my attention was brought to a 2008 article by Michiel Wind in the German magazine *Kaissiber*. His excellent analysis supported my conclusions about 7 ... Bf5, and yet this line is still played only infrequently today – perhaps because Wind's article was never translated into English. In any case, there seems little doubt that the Icelandic Gambit's reputation depends on the evaluation of the lines that follows this move.

As compared to 7 ... Bg4, White no longer has time to develop with Be3. On the other hand, the exchange of queens is now more favourable for White, which she can initiate immediately or after further preparation.

8 Qxe7+

Instead:

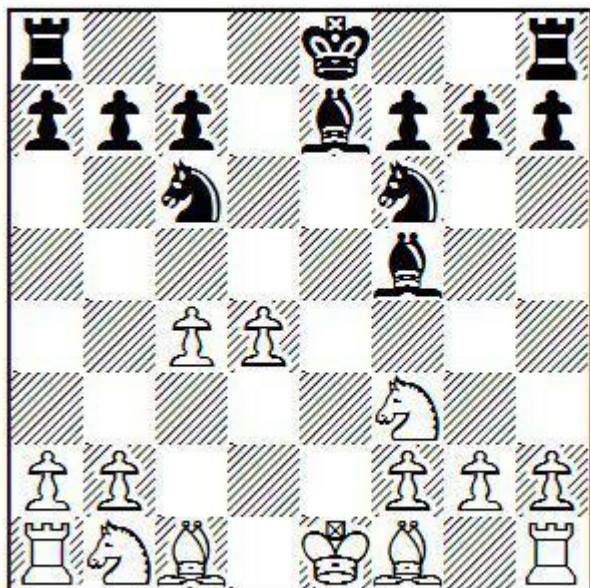
a) 8 Be3? Nb4! would be a colossal error.

b) 8 a3!? is perhaps the most accurate move. Now 8 ... 0-0-0 9 Qxe7 Bxe7 transposes to 9 ... 0-0-0 below, so Black should prefer 8 ... Na5! attempting to reach the main line: 9 Nbd2 c5 10 b4 (10 d5 leaves Black without any more decent waiting moves, hence 10 ... 0-

0-0 11 Qxe7 Bxe7 12 Be2 Rhe8 13 0-0 b5! 14 b3 Bf8! 15 Re1 Bc2 with full compensation for the pawn – analysis courtesy of IM Guy West; 10 Qe3!? is an independent try, though after 10 ... 0-0-0 11 Be2 Qc7!, White may rue not exchanging queens when she had the chance) 10 ... cxb4 11 c5 Nd5! with a complex position. For example, 12 axb4 Nc6 13 Nc4 Qxe2+ 14 Bxe2 Ndx b4 15 Ne3 Nd3+ 16 Bxd3 Bxd3 17 Bb2 f6 18 Ba3 Na5! and Black's superior minor pieces compensate for White's strong central pawns.

8 ... Bxe7

Black's compensation in the endgame lies in her superior development. Her minor pieces are already mobilized and she is ready to launch active operations against the white position. The vulnerable light-squared weaknesses in the white queenside (namely c2, and potentially b3 if White plays a2-a3) are attractive targets, while her extra pawn on d4 will quickly come under attack. However, it is important to remember that these advantages are largely temporary in nature, so Black must strive to play energetically to make use of these trumps before White has time to consolidate. If Black does so, she will discover that her compensation is worth at least a pawn, even without the queens on the board.



9 a3

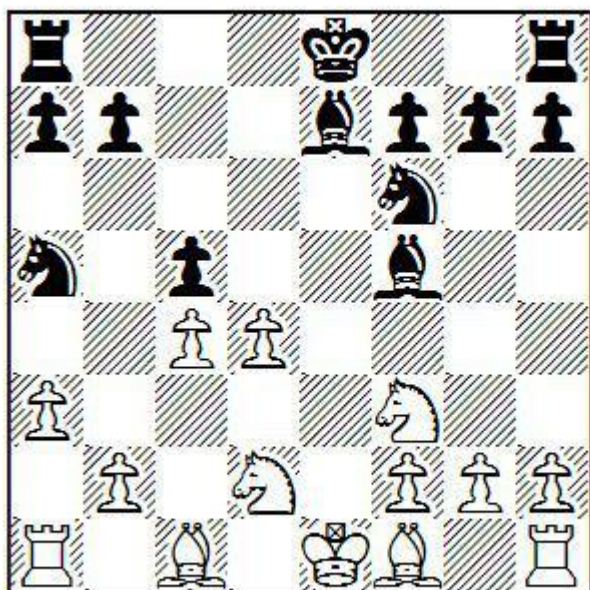
We looked at 9 Be3 Nb4 10 Na3 in Game 16 (Pruess-Gareyev), where 10 ... 0-0! 11 Be2 (or 11 h3 c6) 11 ... Ng4! would have given Black decent play after securing the bishop pair.

9 ... Na5!

A fine suggestion by Michiel Wind. Black embarks on a quick assault against White's centre before White is able to complete her development.

9 ... 0-0-0 is more popular, but Black doesn't have time for this natural move. After 10 Be3 Rhe8 11 Nc3 Bf8 12 Be2, White has a clear advantage.

10 Nbd2 c5!



11 Be2!

Instead:

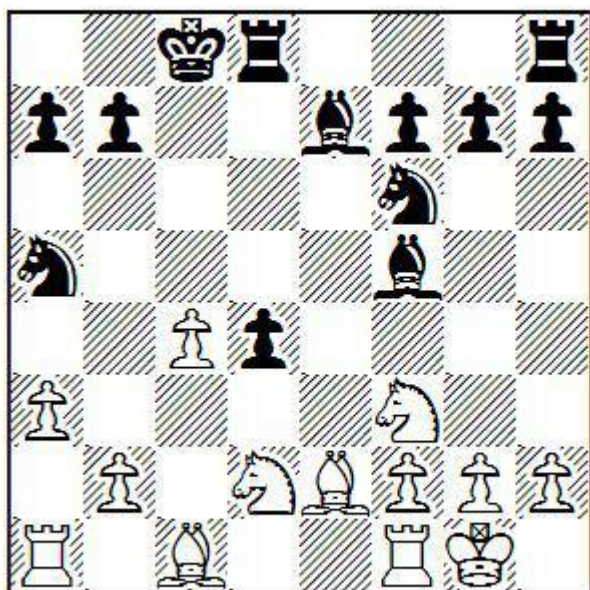
a) 11 dxc5?! (Wind considered this to be the best reply, but in fact White already needs to think about trying to equalize) 11 ... 0-0-0 12 b4?! (Wind's main line; after the superior 12 Be2 Rhe8 13 0-0 Bxc5 14 Bd1 Nc6 15 b4 Bd4!, Black retains good chances with excellent compensation for the pawn – Wind) 12 ... Rhe8 13 Be2 Nh5! 14 g3 (not 14 bxa5? Nf4 15 Nb3 Nxc2+ 16 Kf1 Bh3 17 Nfd4 Bxc5 18 Bg4+ Bxg4 19 Kxg2 Bxd4 20 Nxd4 Rxd4 and Black has a crushing advantage, Cl.Dubois-R.Tleptsok, correspondence 2009) 14 ... Bf6

15 Ra2 Bd3 16 Ng1 Nc6 17 f3 Bc3 gives Black a completely dominant position, worth far more than White's two-pawn advantage (analysis based on Wind).

b) 11 b4 cxb4 12 c5 (after 12 axb4, either 12 ... Bxb4 or 12 ... Nc6! gives equal chances) 12 ... 0-0 13 axb4 Nc6 14 Bc4 Nxb4 15 0-0 b6 with equality.

c) 11 d5 invites Black to transpose to the 8 a3 Na5 9 Nbd2 c5 10 d5 line above with 11 ... 0-0-0, but even better is 11 ... 0-0 12 Be2 b5!, which favours Black; White will soon face problems with her underdeveloped queenside.

11 ... 0-0-0 12 0-0 cxd4



Here, Wind ends his analysis, claiming equality. From a practical point of view this is also a good point to finish memorizing your theory. It should be noted, however, that Black is still a little way off from achieving a fully equal game. Although Black has regained the pawn, her d-pawn is more of a weakness than a strength, and White can begin to mass her forces around it while pushing forward on the queenside. Black needs to play accurately to maintain the balance, so let's dig deeper:

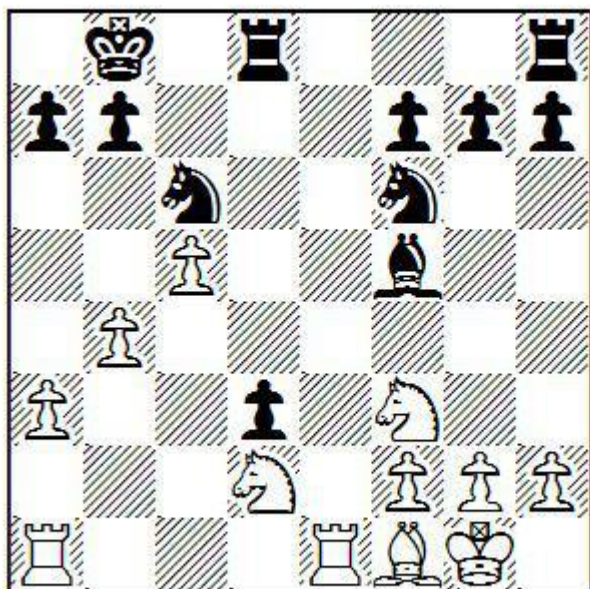
13 Re1

13 b4 d3! kicks White's bishop to a less comfortable square: 14 Bd1 Nc6 15 Bb2 Rhe8 16 Re1 Bd6 with balanced chances.

13 ... d3 14 Bf1 Nc6 15 b4 Nh5! 16 Bb2 Bf6 17 Bxf6 Nxf6 18 c5!

Securing the d6-square and preparing a future Nc4.

18 ... Kb8!



A high-class waiting move, anticipating a knight landing on d6 in the future. After 18 ... Rhe8?! 19 Rxe8 Nxe8 20 Nc4 Kc7 21 Rd1, the d-pawn will soon fall.

19 Nc4

Or 19 Rad1 a5! (now that the rook has left the queenside, Black immediately begins to soften up White's pawns on that side of the board) 20 Nc4 axb4 21 axb4 Rhe8! 22 Nd6 Rxe1 23 Nxe1 Bg6 24 Bxd3 Nxb4 25 Bxg6 fxg6 26 Rb1 Nfd5! and Black has everything covered.

19 ... Nd4! 20 Rad1 Rhe8 21 Rxe8 Nxf3+ 22 gxf3 Nxe8 23 Ne5 a5!

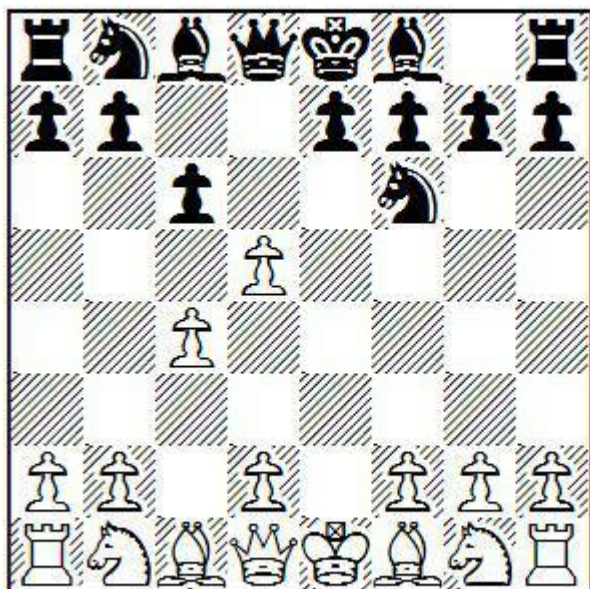
White has managed to round up the d-pawn, but Black's activity and superior structure mean she is in no danger. The game should end in a draw.

Chapter Ten

The Panov-Botvinnik Attack

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 c6



As opposed to 3 ... e6, accepting the gambit after 3 ... c6 is not considered White's best option. There are two reasons for this. The first is because Black is effectively one move faster with her development after 4 dxc6 Nxc6, as her light-squared bishop will reach an active location on f5 or g4 in one move rather than (after 3 ... e6 4 dxe6 Bxe6) in two. The second reason is that, after 3 ... c6 4 dxc6, Black can follow up with a quick ... e7-e5, immediately controlling or challenging the centre.

On the other hand, declining the gambit with 3 ... c6 4 d4 now makes a lot more sense. The transposition to the Caro-Kann's Panov-Botvinnik Attack typically leads to positions where White has an isolated queen's pawn, strikingly similar to those often reached

from a Nimzo-Indian Defence or even a Queen's Gambit Accepted. These lines are sound and perfectly acceptable for Black from a theoretical perspective, but they lack a certain panache for players whose heart is set on the sort of excitement we've seen after 3 d4 Bg4. Therefore, we will investigate an interesting sideline of the Panov-Botvinnik that is more, shall we say, 'stylistically appropriate'.

Game 19

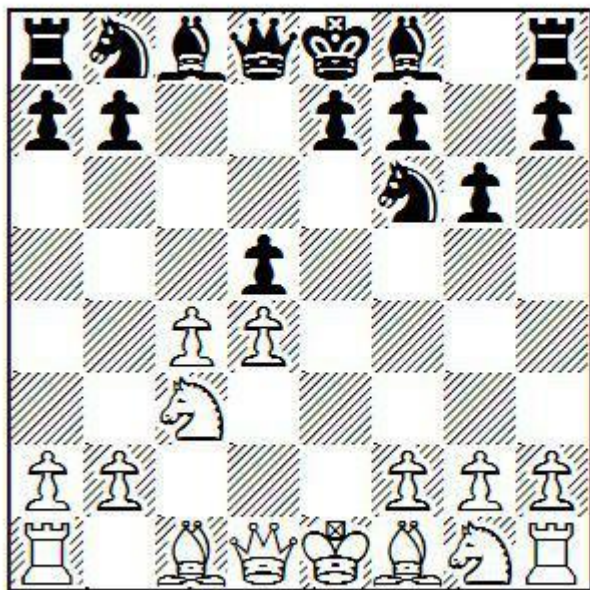
A.Naiditsch-Bo.Vuckovic

European Championship, Rijeka 2010

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 c6 4 d4

You may encounter 4 dxc6?! Nxc6 5 Nf3?! from time to time, despite the fact that, after 5 ... e5!, Black is already clearly better.

4 ... cxd5 5 Nc3 g6!?



Not the most popular line for Black, but certainly more exciting than the standard positions of the Panov-Botvinnik Variation of the Caro-Kann, into which we have transposed. This game in fact arose via a Caro-Kann move-order: 1 ... c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6.

6 Qb3

The other main line runs 6 cxd5 Nxd5 7 Qb3 (or 7 Bc4 Nb6! 8 Bb3 Bg7 9 Nf3 0-0 10 d5 Bg4 11 0-0 N8d7 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Nc5!, when Black has easy play around the isolated d-pawn after exchanging on b3 and manoeuvring the remaining knight to d6) 7 ... Nb6 8 Bb5+ and now Black has the powerful novelty 8 ... Nc6!, intending to sacrifice an exchange after 9 d5 a6 10 Ba4 Nxa4 11 Qxa4 b5! 12 Nxb5 axb5 13 Qxa8 Nd4 with a dangerous initiative – see the theory section.

6 ... Bg7 7 cxd5 0-0 8 Be2 a5!

A rare sideline, but surprisingly strong. Black threatens to run her a-pawn down the board in order to divert the white pieces from the d5-pawn, while controlling the b4-square can be quite useful too, as we will see.

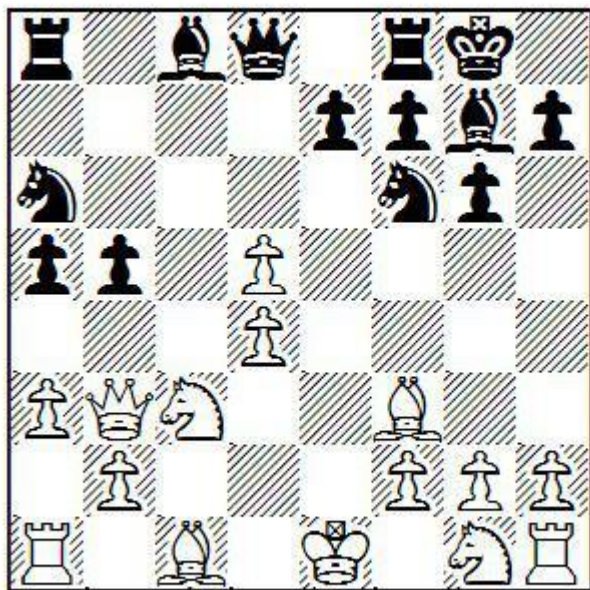
9 Bf3

9 Nf3 a4 10 Nxa4 Nxd5 11 Nc3 Nb6! 12 d5 e6! gives Black great play for the pawn.

9 ... Na6!

Eyeing up b4.

10 a3 b5!



One can't help but be impressed by Black's dynamic play. White isn't given a moment of peace.

11 Qxb5

White's alternatives 11 Nxb5 and 11 d6!? are discussed in the theory. Black retains enough activity to compensate for the sacrificed material in either case.

11 ... Nc7 12 Qb3 a4

12 ... Ba6! is the simplest way to increase the pressure. For example, 13 Nge2 Rb8 14 Qa2 Qd7! with the straightforward idea of ... a5-a4, ... Rb3, and capturing on d5. Black has an excellent game.

13 Nxa4 Ncxd5?!

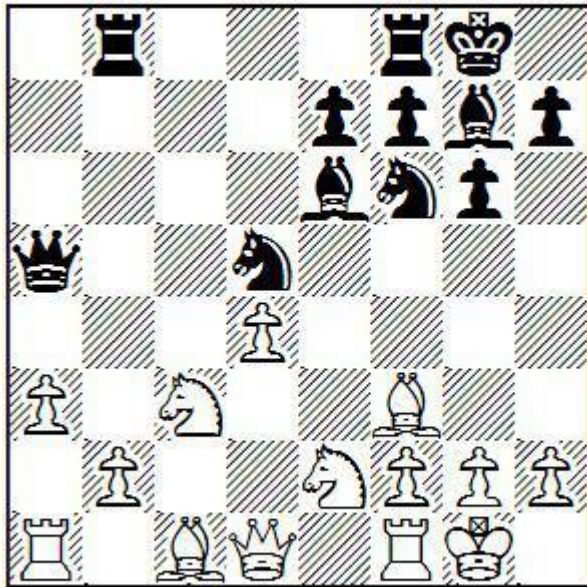
13 ... Nfxd5! is more accurate: then after 14 Ne2 Ba6 15 0-0, Black has the strong option of 15 ... Bxe2 16 Bxe2 Ne6!, followed by ... Nxd4. Instead, 15 Nac3! is better and slightly favours White, though even here Black retains excellent compensation and her position is certainly a lot more fun to play after 15 ... Nxc3 16 bxc3 e5!.

14 Ne2 Qa5+

Now 14 ... Ba6 can be safely met by 15 0-0 with a clear advantage for White.

15 Nac3 Be6 16 Qd1 Rab8 17 0-0

Black's position looks imposing, but White has managed to castle while avoiding any tactical catastrophes. Still, dangers remain, as Black has an impressive amount of activity for the two pawns.



17 ... Rfc8?!

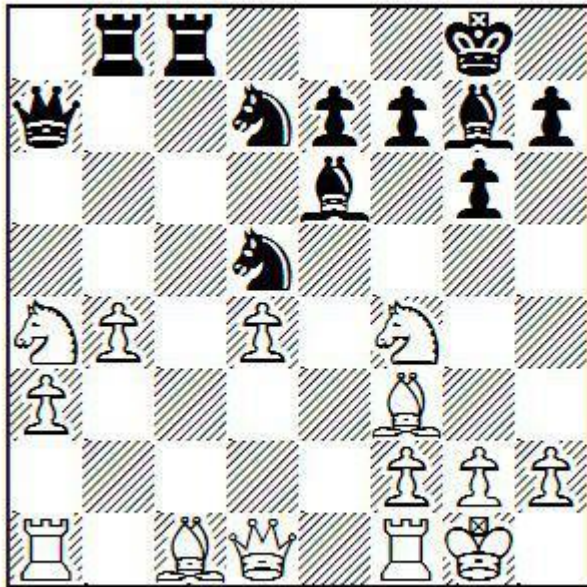
Here 17 ... Nxc3! 18 bxc3 Bc4 was stronger, with ideas of ... Nd5 and ... Rfc8. Black can also consider ... Rb2 once the white bishop inevitably moves from c1.

18 Na4! Nd7 19 b4! Qa7

White has defended well, and now simply developing the dark-squared bishop would have left Black struggling to justify the two-pawn deficit.

20 Nf4??

A horrible blunder.



20 ... Rxc1!!

The white queen is embarrassingly overworked in defence of her knights.

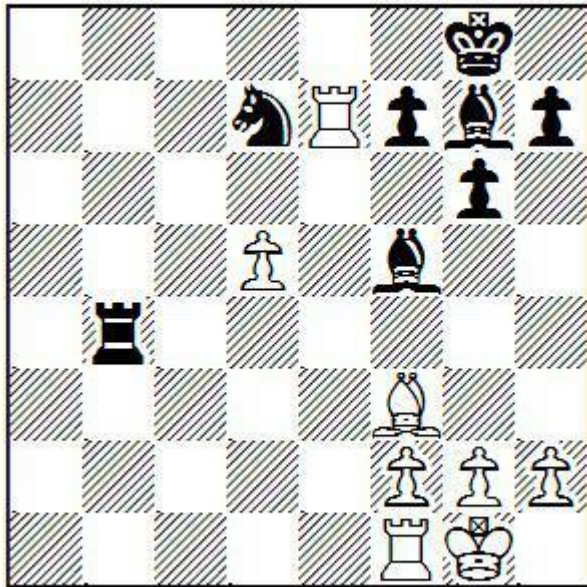
21 Qxc1 Nxf4 22 Qxf4 Qxa4

Material is roughly level, but the combination of the bishop pair and White's helpless pawns look to give Black a comfortable advantage. This was borne out in the remainder of the game, but, unbelievably, there is a symmetrical rook-for-two-pieces tactic hidden in this position.

23 Rae1! Qxa3 24 d5?

Missing the chance for revenge! 24 Rxe6!! fxe6 25 Qc7! Qxb4 (or 25 ... Qa4 26 Bc6!) 26 Qxd7 Qd6 27 Qxd6 exd6 28 d5! with a drawn endgame.

24 ... Bf5 25 Rxe7 Qxb4 26 Qxb4 Rxb4

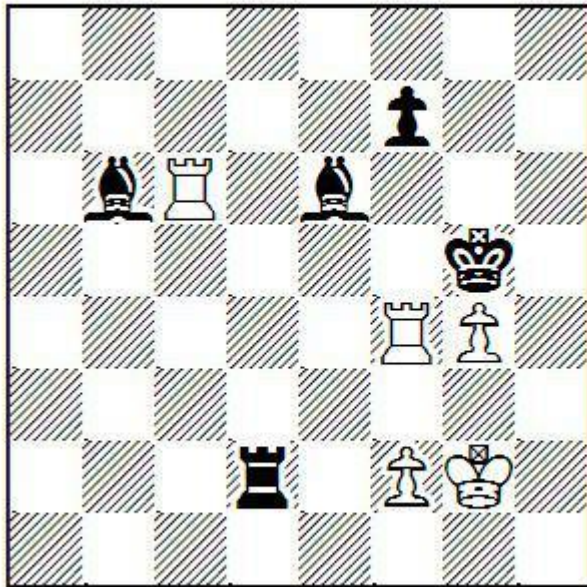


Black has emerged with a clear advantage. The white d-pawn will not be able to survive much longer, after which Black's attention will turn towards f2.

27 h3 Bf8 28 Re8 h5 29 Rd1 Kg7 30 d6 Rb6 31 g4 Be6 32 gxh5 gxh5 33 Bxh5 Bxd6 34 Bg4 Nf6 35 Rd8 Be7 36 R8d4

36 Bxe6 Bxd8 37 Bxf7 offered perhaps the best practical chances, though I can imagine Naiditsch didn't fancy trying to defend such an endgame.

36 ... Bc5 37 Rf4 Nxg4 38 hxg4 Rb2! 39 Rd3 Kg6 40 Kg2 Bb6 41 Rc3 Rd2 42 Rc6 Kg5



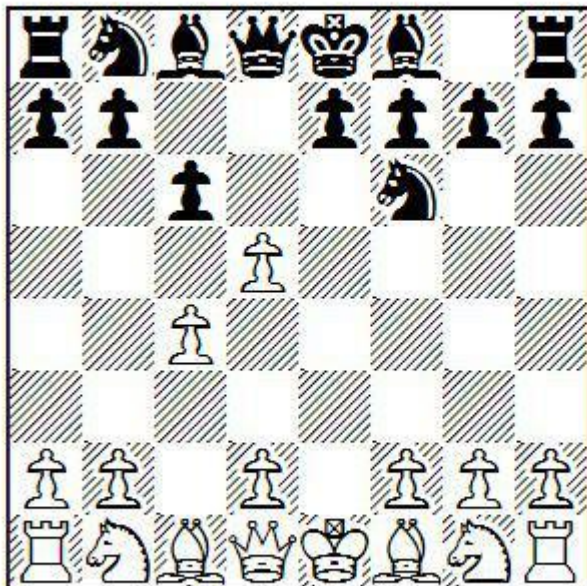
White's position collapses.

43 Rxb6 Kxf4 44 Rb4+ Ke5 45 Kg3 Rd4 46 Rb5+ Bd5 47 f4+ Ke4 48 f5 Rd3+ 49 Kh4 Kf4! 0-1

White's king is caught in a mating net. A fine culmination of Black's brave opening play.

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 c6



We will consider:

A: 4 dxc6?!

B: 4 Nc3

C: 4 d4

A: 4 dxc6?!

A surprisingly common error, after which White can hope for equality at best.

4 ... Nxc6 5 Nf3?!

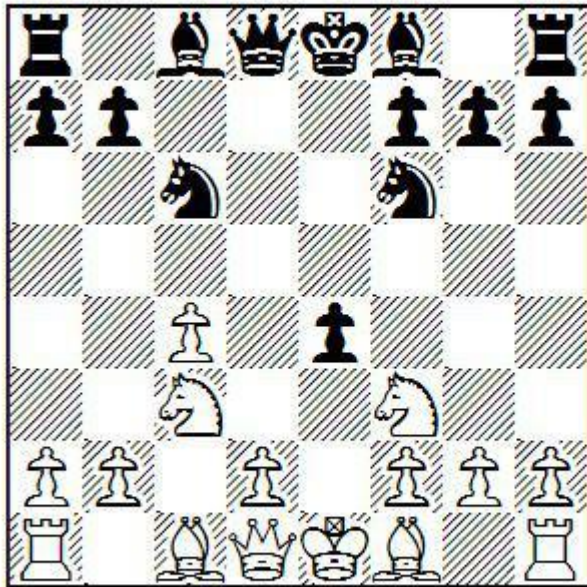
Easily the most popular move, but the knight will soon prove to be a target.

5 Nc3! is preferable, though 5 ... e5! still grants Black a powerfully active position for the pawn. Her pieces can emerge easily on natural squares, whereas White is permanently saddled with a weak d-pawn and cramped development. One grandmaster encounter saw 6 d3 Bf5 7 Nf3 e4 (7 ... Bb4!?) 8 dxe4 (8 Nh4! Bg4 9 Be2 Bxe2 10 Qxe2 Qxd3 offers White good chances to equalize) 8 ... Nxe4 9 Be2 Bb4 10 Bd2 Nxd2 11 Nxd2 Nd4 with a clear advantage to Black, B.Savchenko-K.Asrian, Moscow 2007.

5 ... e5! 6 Nc3?

Here 6 d3 is best, though 6 ... e4! secures the better game anyway: 7 dxe4 Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Nxe4 (White's king is dreadfully exposed, and Black can continue to develop with gains of time) 9 Be3 Bf5 10 Kc1 (or if 10 Nh4 0-0-0+ 11 Kc1, M.Chandler-Mi.Adams, Hastings 1989/90, then 11 ... Bg4! 12 f3 Be7! with a clear advantage) 10 ... 0-0-0 11 Be2 Bc5 12 Bxc5 Nxc5 13 Nc3? (allowing a cute finish, but White was already busted) 13 ... Nb4 14 Nh4 Nxa2+! 0-1 V.Zwardon-I.Rausis, Czech Championship, Ostrava 2014.

6 ... e4



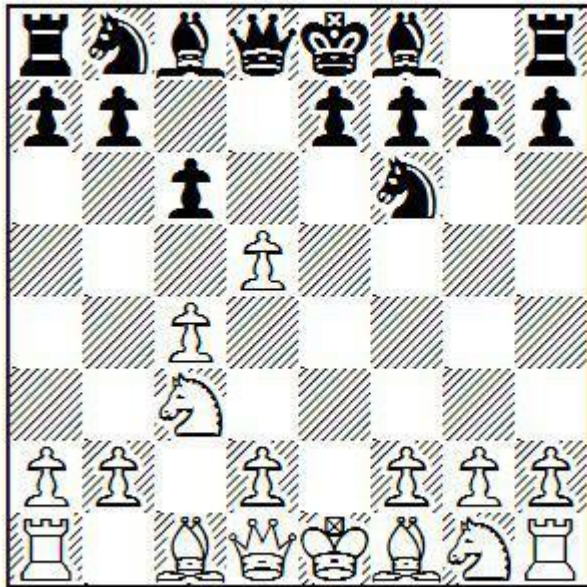
Black has gained a clear advantage after half a dozen moves. Games played from this position don't tend to last very long:

a) 7 Ng1 Bc5 8 Be2? Qd4! 9 Nh3 Bxh3 0-1 Da.Demidov-Al.Kulikov, Kstovo 2010.

b) 7 Qe2? Qe7 8 Ng1? (or 8 Ng5 Nd4 9 Qd1 h6 10 Nh3 Bxh3 11 gxh3 Nf3+, winning) 8 ... Bg4 0-1 A.Monir-W.Paschall, Budapest 2009.

c) 7 Ng5 Bf5 8 f3 exf3 9 Nxf3 Bc5 also leaves Black clearly better; White's king is hopelessly trapped in the centre and will soon come under a colossal attack.

B: 4 Nc3



This can often transpose to line C, but White has some options that involve delaying d2-d4 in favour of putting immediate pressure on d5. We will discuss these independent alternatives here.

4 ... cxd5 5 cxd5

5 d4 is a direct transposition to line C.

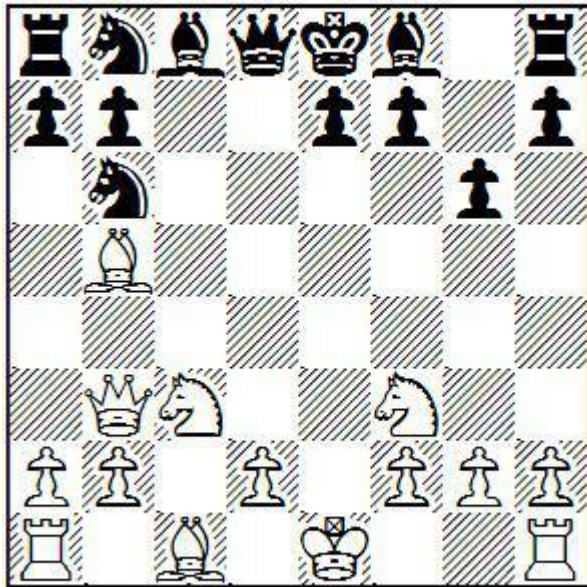
5 ... Nxd5

5 ... g6!? is a similar pawn sacrifice to those discussed later. For example, 6 Bc4 Bg7 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 Na6!? 9 d4 Nc7 10 Qb3 a6 11 a4 b5! 12 axb5 axb5 13 Rxa8 bxc4 14 Qa2 Nxa8 15 Qxa8 Qd6 was level in D.J.Kovachev-T.Gabrielsen, Oslo 2009.

6 Nf3

This time 6 d4 g6 transposes to line C2.

6 ... g6 7 Qb3 Nb6 8 Bb5+!?



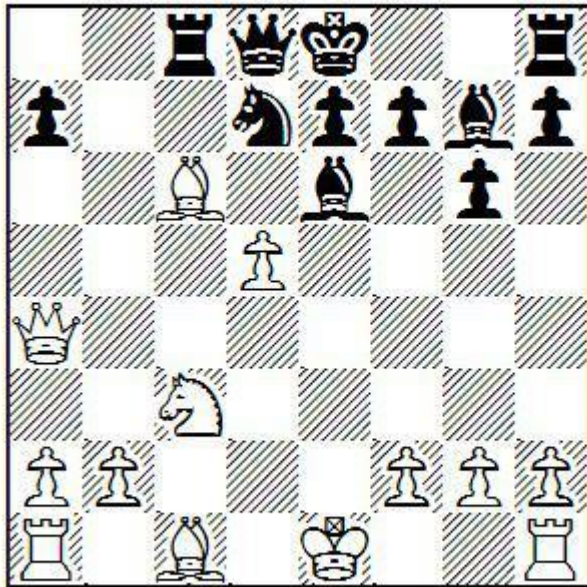
The only independent try (for 8 d4, see 8 Nf3 in line C22). Now Black has a choice.

8 ... Bd7

Instead:

a) 8 ... N8d7!? 9 Ne5 looks awkward, but in fact Black's position is quite stable after the ugly-looking 9 ... e6 10 Ne4 (here 10 d4 Bg7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Rd1 Qc7 is slightly more comfortable for White, but it's not much) 10 ... Be7 11 d4 0-0, when White's early assault has come to nothing. For example, 12 Bh6 Nxe5! 13 Bxf8 Kxf8 14 dxe5 Qd4 15 Nc3 Qxe5+ 16 Be2, Ma.Thesing-P.Trzaska, Dortmund 1992, and here 16 ... Nd5! would have given Black the more promising position.

b) 8 ... Nc6?! would be the consistent choice (given my primary recommendation in line C22), but there is a tactical flaw: 9 Ne5! (forcing Black to sacrifice a pawn, though things aren't entirely clear) 9 ... Be6! 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Bxc6+ Nd7 12 Qa4 (White needs to be precise: 12 Qb5! seems better, when 12 ... Rc8 13 d4 Bg7 14 d5 Bf5 15 0-0 0-0 16 Qe2 leaves Black struggling to prove full compensation) 12 ... Rc8 13 d4 Bg7 14 d5

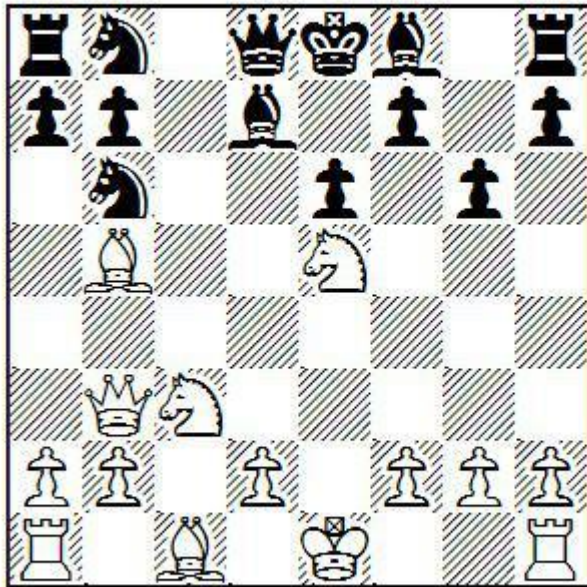


14 ... 0-0!! (a wonderful concept) 15 dxe6 Nc5 16 Qb5 Nxe6 17 Be3 Bxc3+ 18 bxc3 Qc7 19 0-0 Qxc6 20 Qxc6 Rxc6 21 Bxa7 Ra8 ½-½ Alb.David-P.V.Vishnu, Kolkata 2012. Despite this, I don't fully trust 8 ... Nc6, so we now turn back to 8 ... Bd7.

9 Ne5

9 d4 Bxb5!? (9 ... Bg7 is almost universally played, leading to well-analysed positions in which Black's score is more than respectable; however, the text is also fine and comes with extra surprise value) 10 Nxb5 (or 10 Qxb5+ Nc6 11 d5 a6!) 10 ... Bg7 11 Bf4 Na6 12 Nc3 0-0 13 0-0 Nc7 14 Rfe1 Ncd5 with equality, J.Doery-O.Hartvig, Tastrup 1990.

9 ... e6

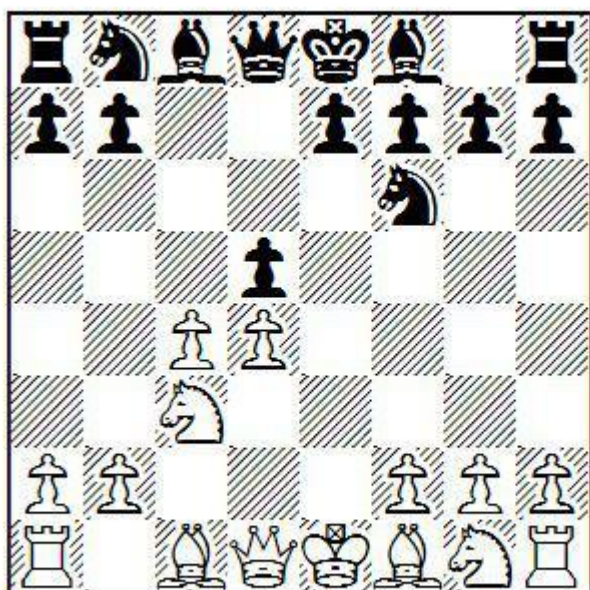


Black has been forced into an optically ugly pawn structure, but the truth is that White cannot take advantage of the dark-squared holes, and she is in danger of falling behind in development. The position is balanced. For example:

a) 10 d4 Bc6! 11 0-0 Bg7 is equal; the critical d5-square is well within Black's grasp.

b) 10 Ne4 Be7 11 d4?! (11 Nxd7 is equal) 11 ... Bc6! and with d5 firmly under control, Black is slightly better.

C: 4 d4 cxd5 5 Nc3



Now we are officially within the domain of the Caro-Kann, in a position more commonly reached via 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3. Thousands of games have been played from the diagram after the most popular continuations 5 ... e6 and 5 ... Nc6, both of which are considered to bring Black equality in the long run. You are of course welcome to supplement your Scandinavian repertoire with either of those variations, but they are stylistically less suitable to the system proposed in this book, and consequently you should check other sources. Instead, I am proposing an unusual sideline more suited to the eccentric gambiteer. It is initiated with:

5 ... g6!?

From the outset, it is comforting to note that this move has a very respectable theoretical reputation as well, having been frequently employed by such heavyweights as Morozevich, Kamsky and Grischuk. Black ignores the immediate pressure to d5 and is prepared to sacrifice the pawn for quick development and energetic piece activity. I have supplemented the existing body of theory on this variation with extra analysis and a few novelties of my own, each designed to maximize the chances of catching out our opponents.

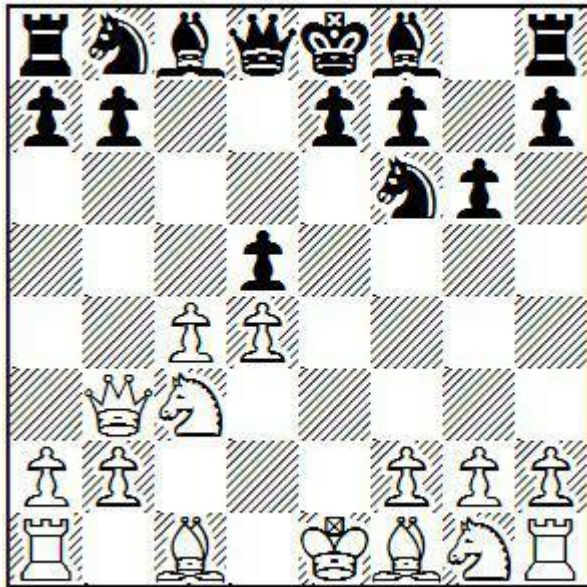
Theory now considers 6 Qb3 to be the main move, though 6 cxd5 is equally popular in practice.

C1: 6 Qb3

C2: 6 cxd5

Instead, 6 Nf3 Bg7 7 cxd5 (7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 leads us to a position more commonly reached from the Symmetrical English – one of the quirkier transpositions in this book! Black has an outstanding score from here in practical play, and typically follows up by taking on c4 and playing against the isolated d-pawn) 7 ... Nxd5 leaves Black without any worries. The extra resource ... Kf8 means that she now has the extra possibility of ... Nxc3 in answer to either Bc4 or Qb3, as 8 Bc4 Nxc3 9 Qb3?? loses to 9 ... Ne4!. Nevertheless, it is probably most consistent just to retreat the knight to b6 in any case. Then 8 Bc4 Nb6 9 Bb3 transposes directly to line C21; while after 8 Qb3 Nb6 9 Bb5+, Black can play in the spirit of line C22 with the following novelty: 9 ... Nc6!? 10 d5 a6! 11 dxc6 axb5 12 cxb7 Bxb7 13 Qxb5+ Kf8! with excellent compensation for the pawn.

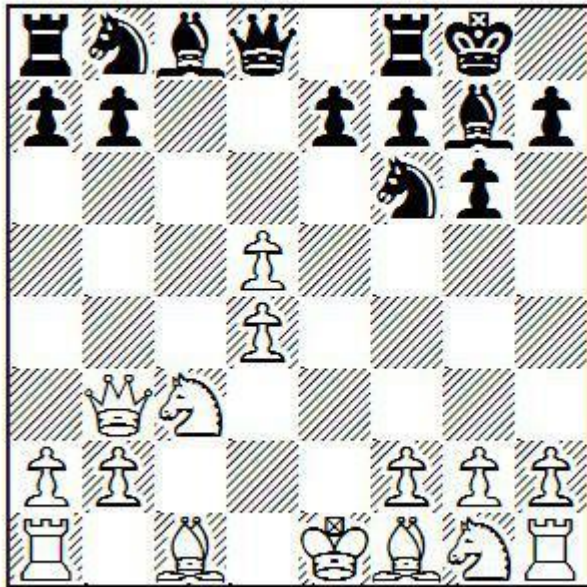
C1: 6 Qb3



6 ... Bg7 7 cxd5

The only consistent follow-up.

7 ... 0-0



White has won a pawn, and has signalled her intentions to hang on to it. It is clear that the immediate battle will revolve around Black's efforts to recapture on d5, not only to regain the material but also to free up her position and help her get at the second d-pawn on d4. If Black is successful, she will likely stand better. White's alternatives thus focus on different attempts to safeguard the front d-pawn.

C11: 8 Nge2

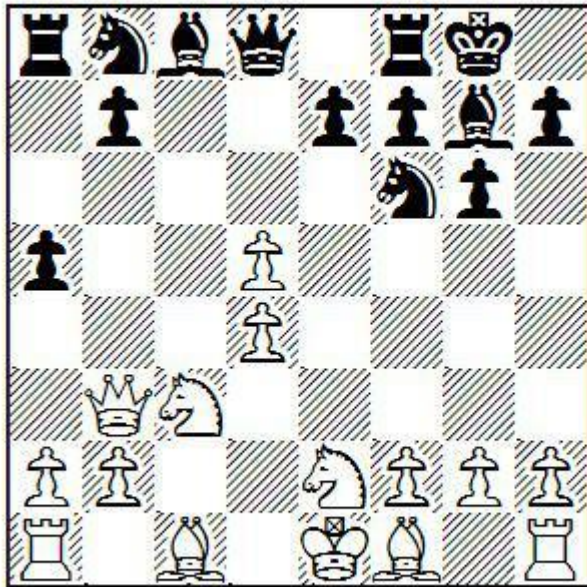
C12: 8 g3

C13: 8 Be2

C11: 8 Nge2

Rare, though a natural idea in these sort of positions. It should be met by the even rarer but incredibly strong:

8 ... a5!!



The advance of the a-pawn is surprisingly difficult to deal with.

9 Nf4

9 a4?! Na6! is already good for Black, as is 9 g3 a4! 10 Nxa4 Qxd5 11 Qxd5 Nxd5 12 Bg2 Rxa4 13 Bxd5 Nc6! with a slight advantage.

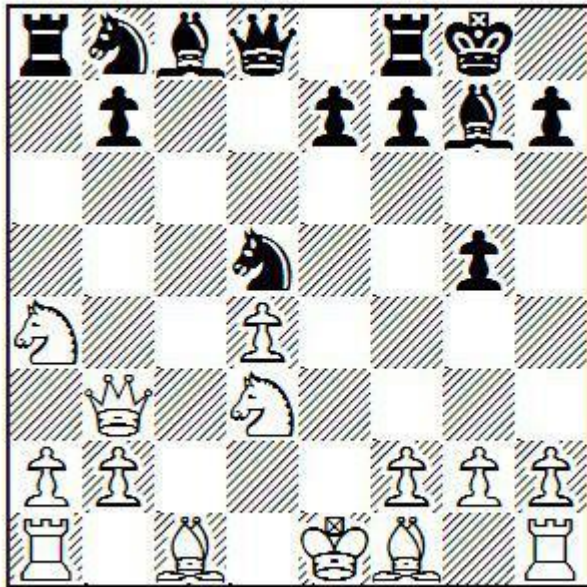
9 ... a4

The immediate 9 ... g5!? is also promising; for example, 10 Nfe2 a4 11 Nxa4 Nxd5 12 Nac3, F.Besozzi-J.Kratochvíl, correspondence 2012, when 12 ... Be6! gives Black a powerful initiative.

10 Nxa4

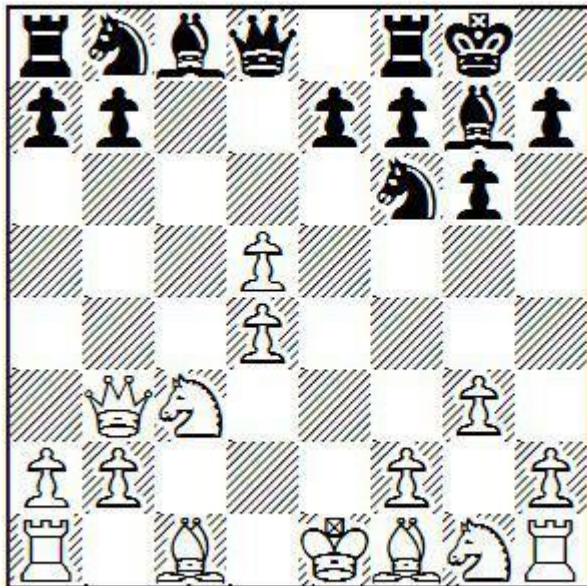
After 10 Qd1 Nbd7 11 Nxa4?, C.Petrelli-A.Sazon, correspondence 2010, and now 11 ... g5! 12 Nd3 Nxd5, Black is again clearly better.

10 ... g5! 11 Nd3 Nxd5



Black has a clear advantage, D.Frolyanov-S.Sjugirov, Tyumen 2012.

C12: 8 g3



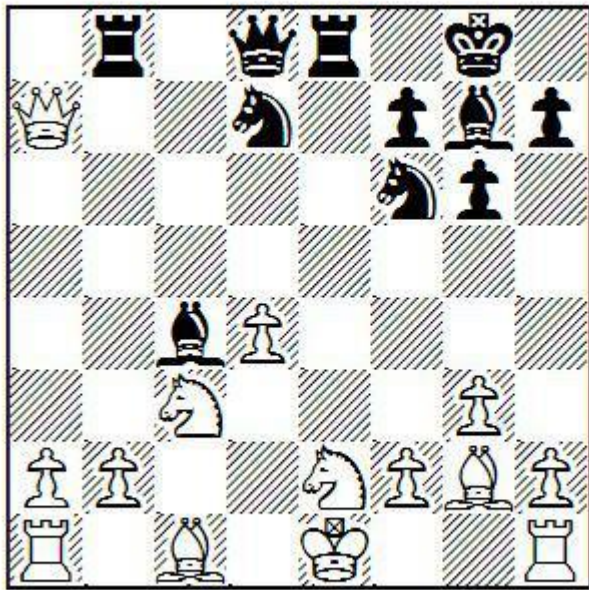
The kingside fianchetto can be safely met by either 8 ... Qb6 or by 8 ... Na6 followed by 9 ... Qb6, with an equal game. But there is an

even more dynamic possibility:

8 ... e6! 9 dxe6

After 9 Bg2 Nxd5, White's structural weaknesses are significant. For example, 10 Nge2 Nc6 11 0-0 Nxc3! 12 bxc3 Na5!, followed by 13 ... Bd7, with excellent play against White's hanging pawns.

9 ... Bxe6 10 Qxb7 Nbd7 11 Bg2 Rb8 12 Qxa7 Re8 13 Nge2 Bc4!



Black has very dangerous play for the three pawns. For example:

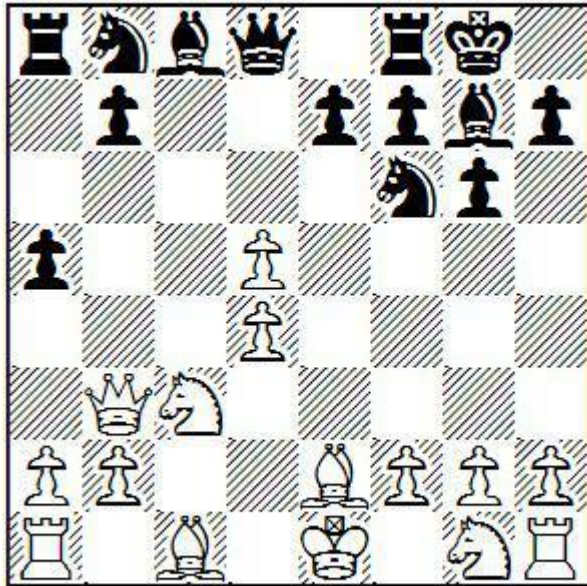
a) 14 b3 Nd5! (the key idea) 15 0-0 (15 Bxd5? Rxe2+ 16 Nxe2 Bxd5 17 0-0 Ra8 traps the white queen; or if 15 Be3?! Nxe3 16 fxe3 Bxe2 17 Kxe2, W.Stern-L.Lepsenyi, correspondence 1972, then 17 ... Nf6! with a clear advantage; White's central pawns are in big trouble) 15 ... Nxc3 16 Nxc3 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 Rc8 with equal chances, M.J.Blake-D.Kappe, correspondence 2010.

b) 14 Bf3 Nd5! 15 0-0 (not 15 Qa4? N7b6 16 Qc2 Qf6! and Black is winning, T.Oim-M.Shereshevski, USSR Championship, Kharkov 1967) 15 ... Nxc3 (here 15 ... Ra8 16 Qb7 Rb8 is a draw, but Black can do better) 16 Nxc3 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 Nf8! with excellent play, fully worth the three pawns, H.Hagesaether-D.Yevseev, Norwegian Team Championship 1998.

C13: 8 Be2

By far the most popular continuation.

8 ... a5!?



A very rare move, although it is a standard theme for Black in this variation and was first played in 1972 by Soltis. A good friend of mine, English GM Gawain Jones, analysed this move on the ChessPublishing website back in 2010, but surprisingly (at least to me) it has failed to take off. The flank attack will certainly take most opponents out of their theoretical knowledge, but more importantly, it seems to offer Black good objective chances as well. Her multipurpose move gains some space on the queenside before developing the knight to a6, from where the a-pawn threatens to harass the white queen with ... a5-a4, support b4, or potentially prepare a pawn sacrifice with a future ... b7-b5.

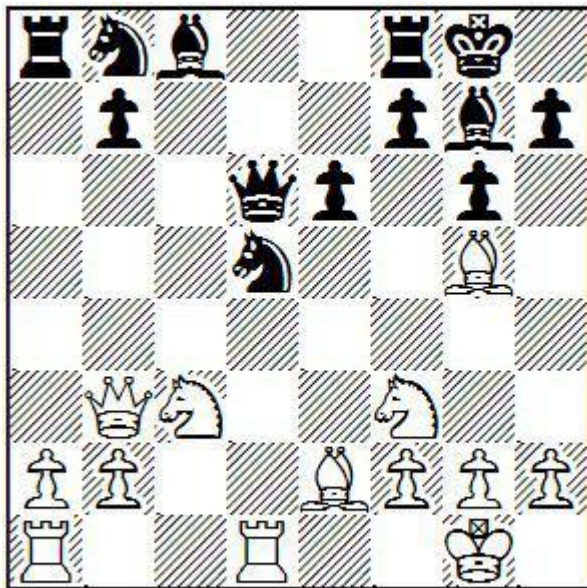
Nowadays, the main line is considered to be 8 ... Na6, which invariably leads to an endgame after the long sequence 9 Bf3 Qb6! 10 Qxb6 axb6 11 Nge2 Nb4 12 0-0 Rd8 13 d6! Rxd6 14 Bf4 Rd7. The theoretical assessment seems to be that Black should be able to equalize after an appropriate amount of suffering. But who wants to do that?

9 Bf3

The natural reply, played four times out of five when White has reached this position. But it is not the best move. Instead:

a) 9 a4?! gifts Black the b4-square for free: 9 ... Na6 10 Nf3 Nb4 11 0-0 Bf5! with a slight advantage for Black.

b) 9 Nf3, switching plans, is considered best by Jones, and I agree. Black is practically forced to turn the pawn sacrifice into a permanent one: 9 ... a4! (here 9 ... Na6 10 Bg5 Nc7 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 0-0 is slightly better for White, M.Hebden-S.Skembris, Vrnjacka Banja 1989) 10 Nxa4 Nxd5 11 Nc3 (or 11 Bc4 b5!! 12 Bxb5 Nc7 13 Be2 Nc6 with excellent compensation for the pawns) 11 ... Nb6 12 d5 (12 0-0 Be6 13 Qc2 Nc6 gives Black reasonable counterplay on the light squares and on the a-file) 12 ... e6! (Black must keep applying the pressure before White has a chance to consolidate) 13 Bg5 (13 dxe6 Bxe6 14 Qc2 Nc6! is better for Black) 13 ... Qd6 14 0-0 Nxd5 15 Rfd1

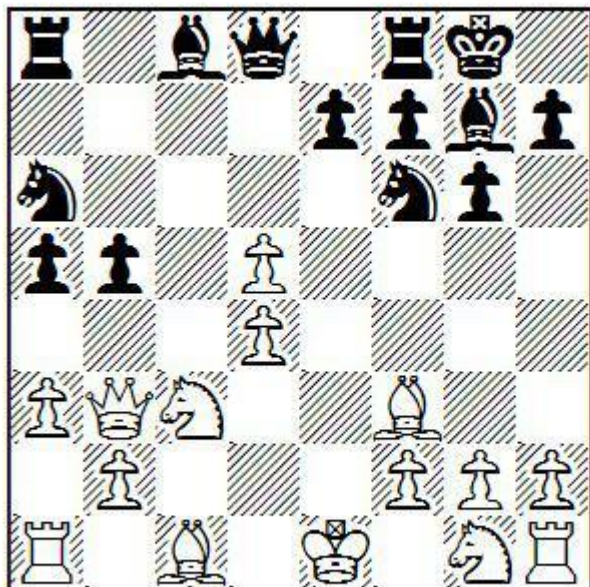


15 ... Qc7! (an important move, ensuring a level game) 16 Rxd5!? (16 Nxd5 exd5 17 Qxd5 Bxb2 is just equal) 16 ... exd5 17 Nxd5 Qa5 18 Ne7+ Kh8 19 Nxc8 Rxc8 20 Qxf7 Qc7 with mutual chances.

9 ... Na6 10 a3

10 Nge2 Nb4 11 0-0 Bf5 12 Bg5 Bc2 13 Qa3 h6 14 Be3 was R.Bellin-D.Bronstein, Hastings 1975/76, and here Jones prefers Black after 14 ... Qd7! due to White's lack of coordination, while Bronstein's suggestion 14 ... Rc8 and even 14 ... g5!? are also strong.

10 ... b5!



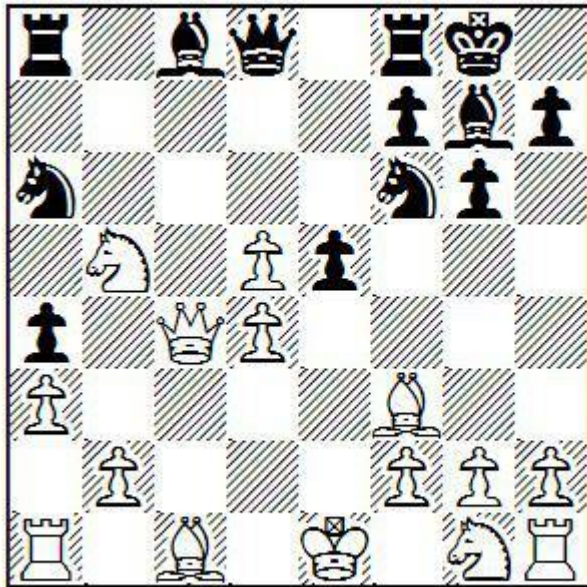
An energetic and consistent follow-up to Black's eighth. White will not be allowed to quietly develop her pieces, but must now turn attention to the rapidly opening queenside.

Alternatively, 10 ... Nc7 11 Nge2 was seen in Cu.Hansen-J.Hector, Vejle 1994, and here 11 ... Bg4!? is promising.

11 Qxb5

Other moves:

a) 11 Nxb5 a4!? (both 11 ... Qb6 and 11 ... Bb7 have potential too; for example, 11 ... Bb7 12 Nc3 Rb8 13 Qa2 Nc7 14 Bf4 Qd7 15 Nge2 Rbc8 16 0-0?! Ncxd5! favours Black, or 16 Bxc7 Rxc7 17 0-0 Rfc8 with sufficient compensation for the two pawns) 12 Qc4 e5!



A surprising blow that releases Black's active potential, sacrificing a third pawn in order to blast open the centre before White can evacuate her king. Play might continue 13 dxe5 Nd7 14 Bf4 Qa5+ 15 Bd2 Nxe5! 16 Bxa5 Nxc4 with enduring activity in the endgame.

b) 11 d6!? Rb8 (11 ... exd6!? is not a blunder, but rather a fiendish exchange sacrifice: 12 Bxa8 Be6 13 Qxb5 Qxa8 14 Nf3 Nc7 15 Qd3 Qc6 with powerful control over the light squares; for White, 14 f3 is probably better) 12 dxe7 Qxe7+ 13 Nge2 Be6 14 Qd1 Nc7 15 0-0 b4 16 axb4 axb4 17 Ne4 Nxe4 18 Bxe4 Rbd8! (in order to meet 19 Bf4 with 19 ... Nb5) leaves Black with sufficient compensation for the pawn, with the game having high drawing chances.

11 ... Nc7 12 Qb3!

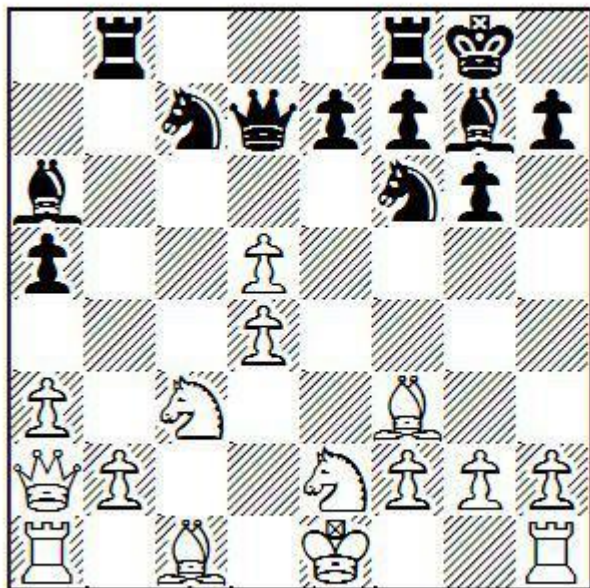
12 Qc6!? (Jones) 12 ... Bd7! 13 Qc4 Rc8 14 Qe2 (or 14 Qa2 e6!) 14 ... Be8! leaves Black on top after recapturing on d5. Black's domination of the board, particularly the light squares, is worth more than a pawn.

12 ... Ba6!

A novelty mentioned by Jones. Instead, 12 ... a4 13 Nxa4 Nfxd5 (even 13 ... Ncxd5?! 14 Ne2 Qa5+ 15 Nac3 Be6 16 Qd1 gives Black a degree of compensation for the two pawns, which proved too difficult for White to handle in Game 19, Naiditsch-Vuckovic) 14 Ne2

Ba6 15 Nac3! is slightly better for White, although 15 ... Nxc3 16 bxc3 e5! still offers Black good play.

13 Nge2 Rb8 14 Qa2 Qd7!

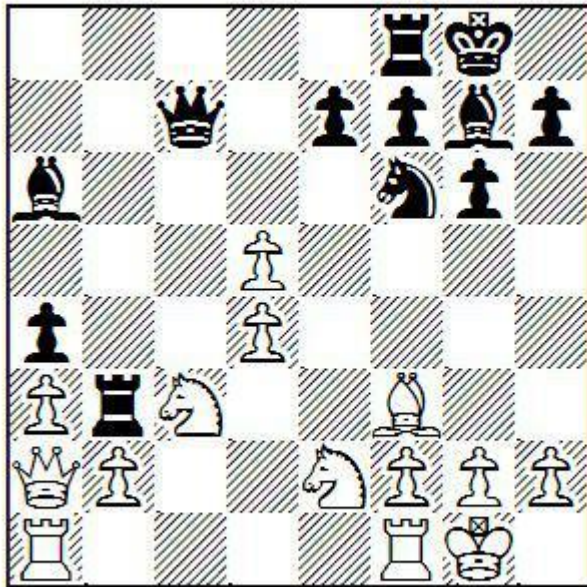


But this is the key idea that really highlights the compensation. Black intends ... a5-a4 and ... Rb3, incarcerating White's queen, followed by simply capturing on d5. All of Black's pieces have superior activity to their opposite numbers, and I believe that White should already start to think about equality. Play might continue:

15 0-0 a4 16 Bf4 Rb3! 17 Bxc7

After 17 Be5 Ncxd5 18 Rfc1 (if 18 Rac1? then 18 ... Bh6! wins) 18 ... Rd8, Black has total control over the board.

17 ... Qxc7



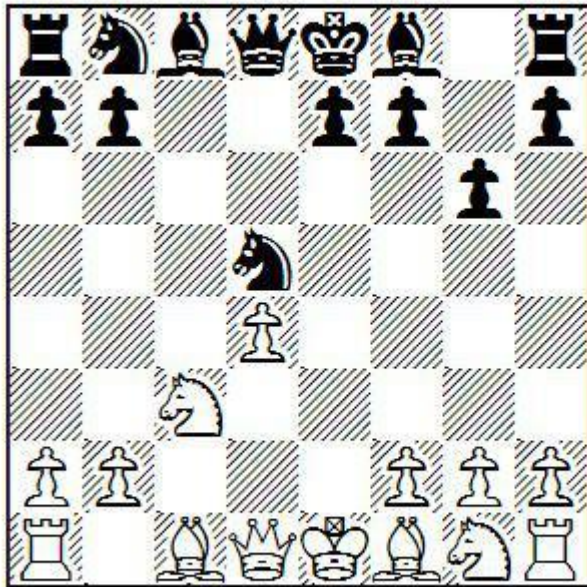
White now needs to find a precise sequence of moves in order to neutralize the pressure, or else Black's initiative will soon prove fatal.

a) 18 Nxa4?? Rxf3! wins. In fact, this threat ensures that both white knights are pinned.

b) 18 Rac1 Rfb8 19 Nxa4 Qa5 20 Nac3 Bh6 gives Black a clear advantage despite the three-pawn deficit.

c) 18 Rfe1! (safeguarding e2) 18 ... Rfb8 19 Nxa4 Qa5 20 Nec3 Bc4 21 Qb1! (not 21 Be2? Rxc3! 22 Bxc4 Rc2 23 d6 e6! and Black has a decisive advantage) 21 ... Nxd5 22 Nxd5 Bxd5 23 Bxd5 Qxd5 24 Qe4! (24 Rxe7?! Qc4! permits the black rooks to enter via b2) 24 ... Qxd4 25 Rad1 Qxe4 26 Rxe4 e6 with a drawn endgame.

C2: 6 cxd5 Nxd5



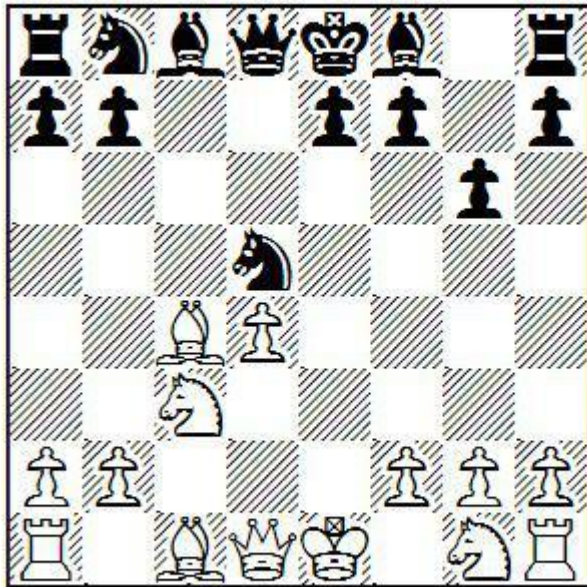
Here 6 ... Bg7 is slightly more popular, but I prefer the other side of the endgame arising after 7 Bb5+ Nbd7 8 d6! exd6 9 Qe2+ Qe7 10 Bf4 Qxe2+ 11 Bxe2!, as in D.Smerdon-I.Rogers, Canberra 2002. A rare game for this book where I have the white pieces!

White has voluntarily taken on an isolated pawn, so she must put pressure on the black position as quickly as possible. Her choices are:

C21: 7 Bc4

C22: 7 Qb3

C21: 7 Bc4



This move is equally as popular as 7 Qb3 in practice.

7 ... Nb6!

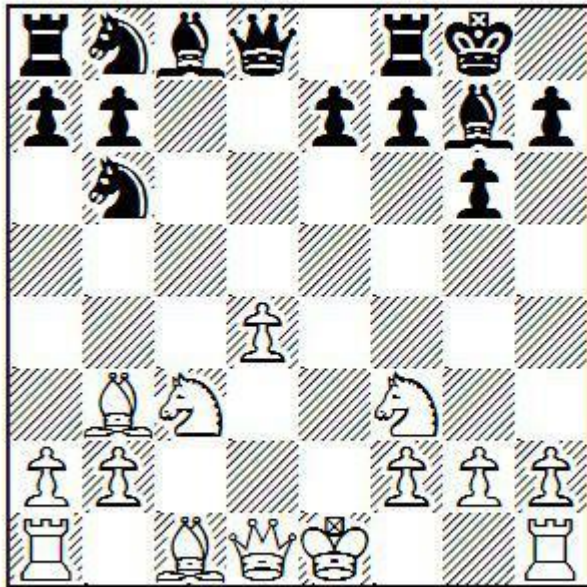
Leading to positions where Black's piece activity resembles that of a Grünfeld Defence. 7 ... Nxc3?! 8 Qb3! is definitely to be avoided.

8 Bb3 Bg7 9 Nf3

If White wants to prevent ... Nc6, now is the most accurate moment to play 9 d5, when 9 ... 0-0 10 Nf3 transposes to the main line.

9 ... 0-0

Here 9 ... Nc6! cuts out 10 d5, and should transpose to 9 ... 0-0 10 0-0 Nc6 below. However, White can get in one move sooner with 9 d5 in any case.

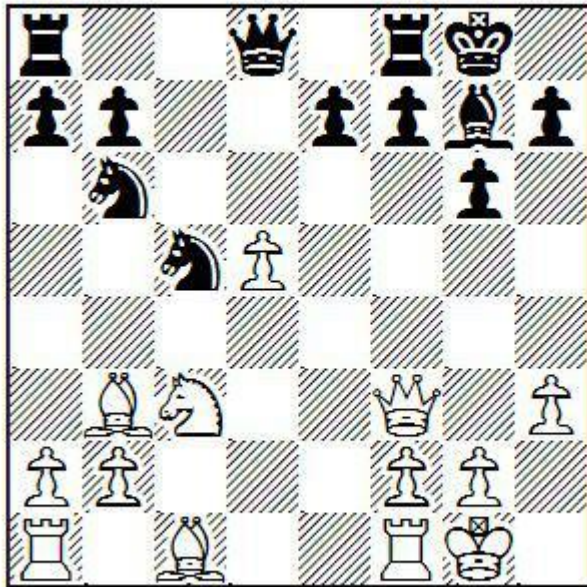


10 d5!?

10 0-0 Nc6 11 d5 Na5 is more commonly seen, but practice has shown that Black has no problems; for example, 12 Re1 Re8! 13 Bg5 (or 13 Ne5 Qd6 14 Nb5 Qc5 15 Nc3 Qd6 and ½-½ S.Glushenkov-E.Podvoysky, correspondence 2012) 13 ... Bxc3 14 bxc3 Nxb3 15 axb3 Qxd5 is nothing special, H.Hamdouchi-R.Edouard, Spanish Team Championship 2012.

10 ... Bg4 11 0-0 N8d7 12 h3 Bxf3 13 Qxf3 Nc5!

Another option is 13 ... Rc8, which worked out well in I.Kurnosov-Da.Dubov, World Rapid Championship, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013: 14 Bg5 h6 15 Bh4 Ne5 16 Qe2 Re8 17 Rad1 Qd7 18 Ne4? Nec4! with a slight advantage to Black.



I prefer Black in these positions, as her plan is relatively straightforward: exchange on b3, put the queen on d7, swing the other knight around via c8 to an excellent post on d6, and bring the rooks to the middle. White can very quickly find herself drifting into a worse position if she is not careful. Let's look at some examples:

14 Bg5

14 Rd1 Nxb3 15 axb3 Nc8 16 Be3 a6 17 Qf4 Nd6 was slightly better for Black in K.Poulheim-De.Leite, correspondence 2012.

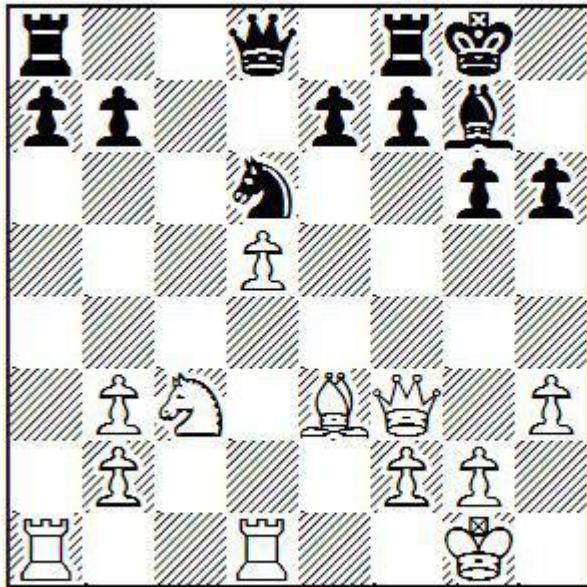
14 ... Nxb3 15 axb3 h6

Alternatively:

a) 15 ... Qd7 16 Rad1 Nc8 17 Rfe1 Re8 18 Re2 Nd6 is very comfortable for Black, V.Tkachiev-V.Gunina, Gibraltar 2013.

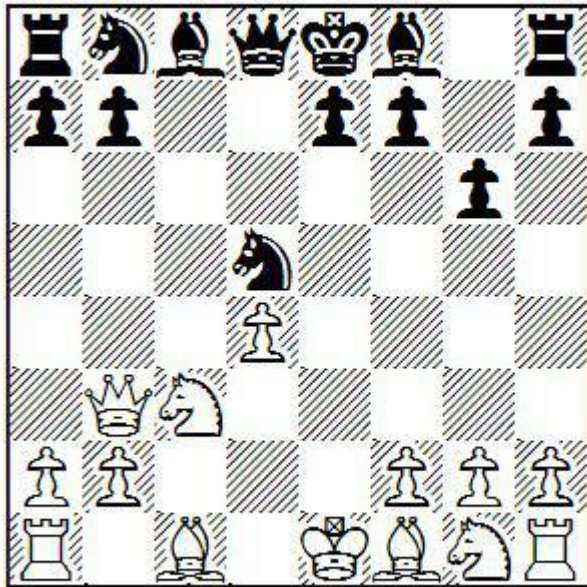
b) 15 ... Re8!? is interesting as well.

16 Be3 Nc8 17 Rfd1 Nd6!



With equality in the high-level test D.Frolyanov-E.Tomashevsky, Russian Team Championship 2013. The game's continuation is instructive: 18 Rxa7 Rxa7 19 Bxa7 Qa5 20 Bd4 Bxd4 21 Rxd4 Qa1+ 22 Rd1 Qxb2 23 Ne4?! Rc8! 24 Nxd6 exd6 25 Qe3 b5! with a clear advantage to Black.

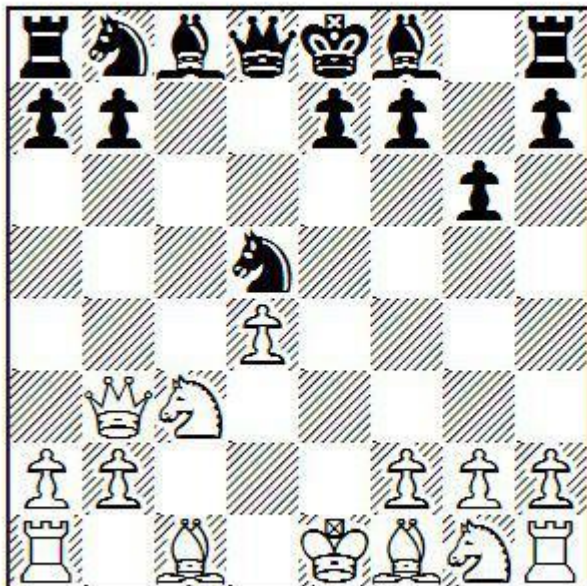
C22: 7 Qb3



7 ... Nb6 8 Bb5+

The simple 8 Nf3 Be6! can hardly trouble Black.

8 ... Nc6!!



Amazingly, despite this line having been played several hundred times, the text is an as-yet unplayed novelty, and is exactly the move

that White's Bb5+ is supposed to prevent.

9 d5

The only consistent reply. 9 Nf3 Be6 10 d5 Bxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 Be3 Qxb3 13 axb3 Nd5 14 Bd4 f6 is slightly better for Black.

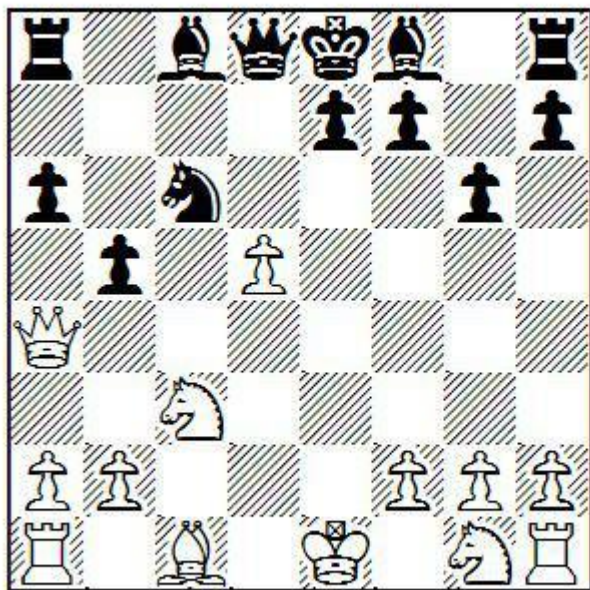
9 ... a6 10 Ba4

Instead:

a) 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 dxc6 Be6 is already good for Black.

b) 10 dxc6 axb5 11 cxb7 Bxb7 12 Nf3 (the attempt to enter an endgame doesn't offer full relief: 12 Qxb5+ Qd7 13 Nf3 Qxb5 14 Nxb5 Bxf3 15 gxf3 Ra5! with a slight advantage to Black) 12 ... Bxf3 13 gxf3 Bg7 14 Qxb5+ Nd7 with excellent compensation. White's kingside defences have been shattered and, with weaknesses on both sides of the board, she has a difficult task ahead to neutralize Black's activity.

10 ... Nxa4 11 Qxa4 b5!



The key idea, sacrificing an exchange to lure White's queen away from the rest of her forces.

12 Nxb5

12 Qf4?! e5! is clearly better for Black.

12 ... axb5 13 Qxa8 Nd4!

13 ... Nb4 14 Kf1 Bg7 15 a3 Nd3 also offers sufficient compensation, but the text is stronger.

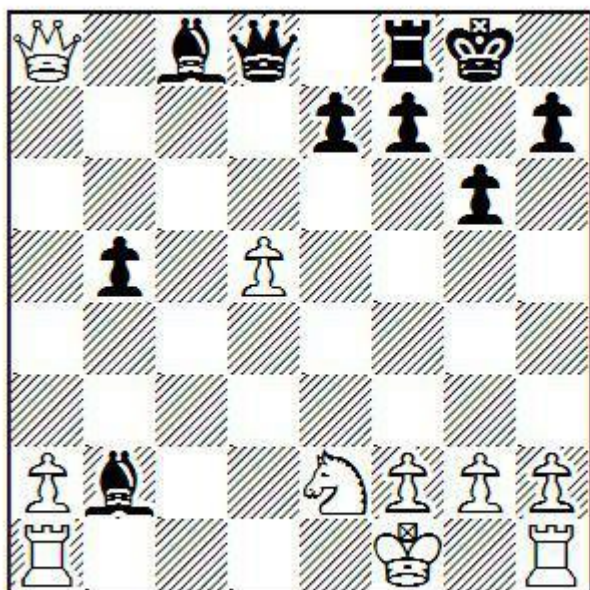
14 Kf1

Attempting to return material is a safer and perhaps better choice, although White is unable to equalize fully: 14 Nf3 Nc2+ 15 Ke2 Nxa1 16 Bg5 Bg7 17 Rxa1 0-0 with more than sufficient compensation for the pawn.

14 ... Bg7 15 Be3 0-0 16 Bxd4

After 16 Rc1? Qd7! or 16 Rd1? Qc7! 17 Bxd4 Qc4+ 18 Ne2 Bg4!, Black has a clear advantage.

16 ... Bxd4 17 Ne2 Bxb2



The bishop pair are dominant on the open board, while White's pieces lie scattered and misplaced. Black has the better chances; for example, 18 Rb1 Be5 19 Rxb5 Qc7! 20 Qa5 Qc2! with a powerful attack.

Section Two – Conclusion

3 c4 occurs quite frequently in practice, usually either as a sceptic's defiant pawn grab, or as a transpositional invitation to the Panov-Botvinnik Caro-Kann. In any case, 3 ... e6 is an excellent gambit that has been rehabilitated thanks to 7 ... Bf5! (line B33) in the main

branch. There is a bit of theory to learn, but in my opinion this is a worthwhile investment to add 3 ... e6 to your repertoire, since White often heads down the wrong track in practice, such as with the natural but weak 5 d4?!

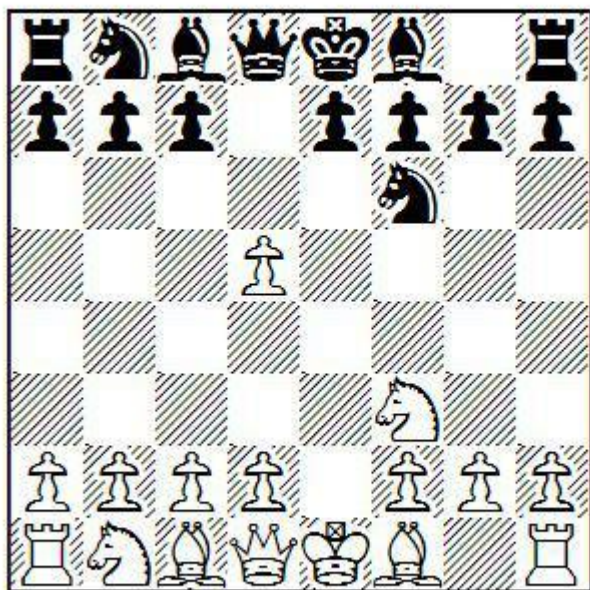
The alternative 3 ... c6 also deserves close attention. Rather than transposing into the heavily-analysed main lines of the Panov-Botvinnik, I am recommending Black adopt a kingside fianchetto with 5 ... g6!?. While this is strictly speaking Caro-Kann territory, this line is rare enough in practice that it is both easy to learn and gives excellent chances of catching your opponent unawares.

At present, both options are theoretically sound and allow Black to sacrifice a pawn or two for dangerous compensation. Learn one, or both; the choice is yours!

Section Three

The Modern Treatment

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nf3



For many players on the black side, this is considered the most annoying move to face for our repertoire. It has been believed in some circles for quite some time now that this move should essentially circumvent any Portuguese-style ... Bg4 gambits. Of course, this is a matter of opinion ... However, before we have a look at the different variations, it is worthwhile discussing why 3 Nf3 is considered such a pain. First, note that after ...

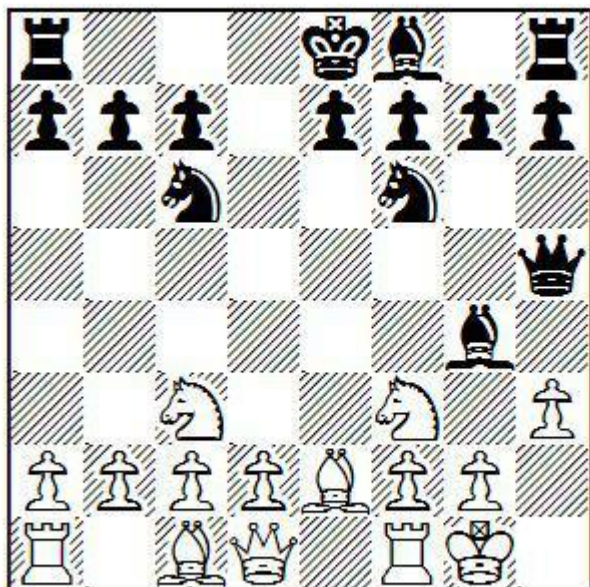
3 ... Qxd5 4 Nc3

Black's queen doesn't have a good square to run to. 4 ... Qa5 will transpose to an orthodox Scandinavian (2 ... Qxd5), while 4 ... Qf5 blocks our own bishop from the g4-square. The seemingly consistent choice ...

4 ... Qh5?! 5 Be2 Bg4 6 0-0 Nc6

... only leads to problems for Black after ...

7 h3!



7 ... Bxf3

Unfortunately, 7 ... 0-0-0? just doesn't work if White hasn't played d2-d4. After 8 hxg4 Nxg4 9 d3 (or 9 Ne4!) 9 ... e5 10 Ne4 Nd4 11 Re1, Black's attack is already flailing, M.Godena-R.Damaso, Lisbon Zonal 1993.

The consistent 7 ... Bxh3? 8 gxh3 Qxh3 also leads nowhere after 9 Ng5!; for example, 9 ... Qh4 10 d3 h6 11 Nge4 and White is winning, A.Yagubi-I.Brikov, Tula 2014.

8 Bxf3 Qf5

Or 8 ... Qc5 9 d3 e6 10 Be3 with a clear advantage to White, A.Kosteniuk-A.Muzychuk, Beijing (blitz) 2013.

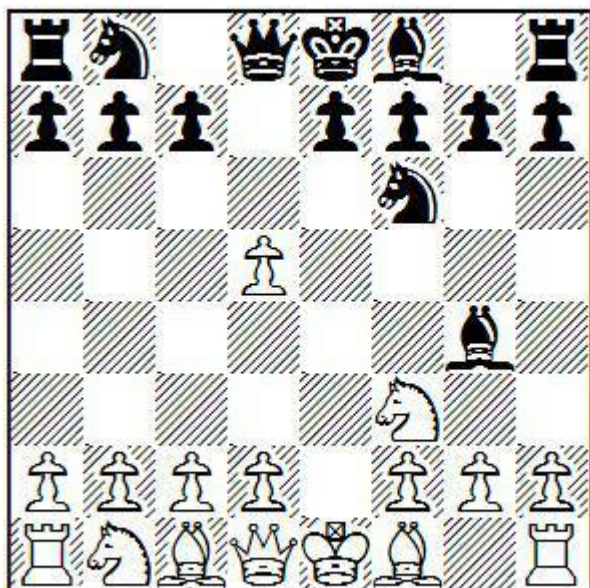
9 d4

Black is left in a passive position, underdeveloped and with little chance of counterplay, F.Nijboer-P.Vandevoort, Brussels Zonal 1993.

This raises an important point worth mentioning about 3 Nf3. It is seen nowhere near as often as the main move 3 d4, largely because it allows Black a reasonably favourable transposition to the 'normal' Scandinavian after 3 ... Qxd5 4 Nc3 Qa5, while cutting out popular sidelines that either delay Nf3 or omit it all together. (The same

cannot be said if Black chooses to transpose to other Scandinavian variations via 4 ... Qd6 or 3 ... Nxd5, in which White invariably plays an early Nf3.) Several strong players have chosen to add a second Scandinavian system to their overall black repertoire for this very reason.

On the other hand, I personally believe that the lines I have presented below are perfectly acceptable for Black, and so we now move to the main dish of this section: 3 ... Bg4.



I have named the (previously unnamed) subvariations with a particular culinary flair. My apologies in advance for this, but a chess author has to have a bit of fun every now and then. There are three key differences that White can try to exploit after the consistent 3 ... Bg4.

To begin with, White can utilize the extra tempo from delaying d2-d4 by playing 4 c4, followed by a quick Qb3, protecting d5 and targeting b7. Essentially, she is attempting to transpose into positions similar to sharp lines of the Panov-Botvinnik Caro-Kann, having arguably saved a tempo by delaying d2-d4. This approach is quite rare in practice but was the recipe recommended by some friends of mine, who are noted Hungarian theoreticians. I've cooked up our own secret antidote to their 'Goulash'.

Second, note that White's third move puts her one move closer to castling kingside (as compared with 3 d4). Thus, she can try to play in classical fashion via 4 Be2 and a quick 0-0 and h2-h3 before Black has had time to organize the standard counterplay using the d4- and e5-squares. In such positions, Black rarely wants to retreat her bishop to h5, where it deprives the black queen of an important square, and so an early exchange on f3 is likely to be necessary. I then propose that we play ... Nc6, allowing an ugly doubling of our c-pawns. Ugly doesn't necessarily mean unwholesome, however, and I have full confidence that you will find my beloved 'Celeriac' very good for your health.

Finally, and most importantly, White can follow up 3 Nf3 Bg4 with 4 Bb5+. Here, the Elbow-like 4 ... c6?! fails to deliver sufficient compensation, while after the natural 4 ... Nbd7, White has the powerful intermezzo 5 h3!. This line is rarely played in practice, but it has been suggested in a couple of published books in recent years as a simple recipe to gain an easy advantage against our opening – the perfect choice for many players, such as my friend Charlie. I imagine that this variation's popularity will increase in the future. In fact 5 h3 presents one of the biggest challenges to our repertoire, but we will see that with careful play and the help of some home-cooked analysis, Black can secure decent chances.

But first of all, a couple of quick appetizers to give this section some flavour.

Game 20

K.Maslak-D.Smerdon

Pardubice 2007

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nf3 Bg4

The day before, I had secured my third and final Grandmaster norm, irrespective of the result of this game. With the pressure off, it was time to have some fun, and so it is no surprise that 3 ... Bg4 appeared on the board. Plus, I had a new idea I was aching to try out

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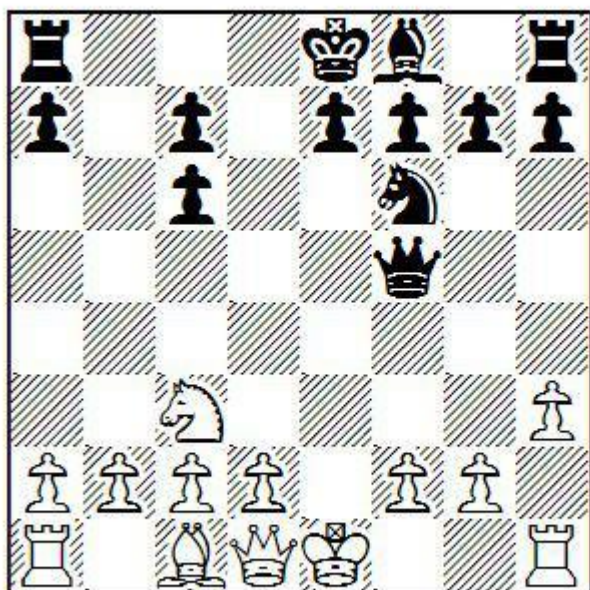
4 Be2 Qxd5 5 Nc3 Qf5! 6 h3

One of the key points of delaying d2-d4. White immediately seeks to break the pin on f3, and in so doing hopes to complete the development phase before Black can build up pressure in the centre via ... Nc6 and ... 0-0-0. However ...

6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Nc6!

A new idea. It takes a certain aesthetic blindness to come up with such an ugly move, as my colleagues were quick to remind me after the game. However, to quote Christina Aguilera, "You are beautiful, no matter what they say." (Yes, I have rather eclectic music tastes.)

8 Bxc6+ bxc6



Chess is so simple: You put your king on d7 (but of course), a bishop on d6, a rook on g8, and then just push your g-pawn down the board and deliver mate. Easy.

Okay, I jest – if only a little. There was a time when the masters would laugh at such a crude structure, but the days of isolated, doubled pawns being considered a fatal weakness are long gone. In modern chess, dynamic considerations and concrete variations often outweigh the Nimzowitschian evaluation of positional elements. This is one such case.

Despite my postmodern standpoint on chess analysis, it is still possible to explain my faith in Black's position in more familiar,

classical terms. For starters, the black king will be surprisingly safe on d7, where the doubled c-pawns will actually provide a handy barrier against unwelcome invasions. Combined with a pawn on e6, bishop on d6, and knight on the excellent semi-outpost on d5, the black king can hardly be called exposed. Moreover, all of Black's pieces will soon become more active than their counterparts; the rooks will have important roles to play along the semi-open b-file and (soon to be) semi-open g-file. This puts the white king in quite a predicament, because it is clear that, whichever side of the board he chooses to hide, an attack is imminent.

I have scored 100% from the diagram in several encounters since this game (usually in blitz, to be fair), and experience has taught me that White's position is by no means easy to defend. Black's attacking plan is straightforward and surprisingly fast. Moreover, there's something deliciously cheeky about the entire set-up that I must confess gives me an extra kick, especially after the inevitable ... Kd7!.

9 Qe2

For 9 d3 e6 10 0-0 Bd6 11 Qe2 g5!? – see the theory section.

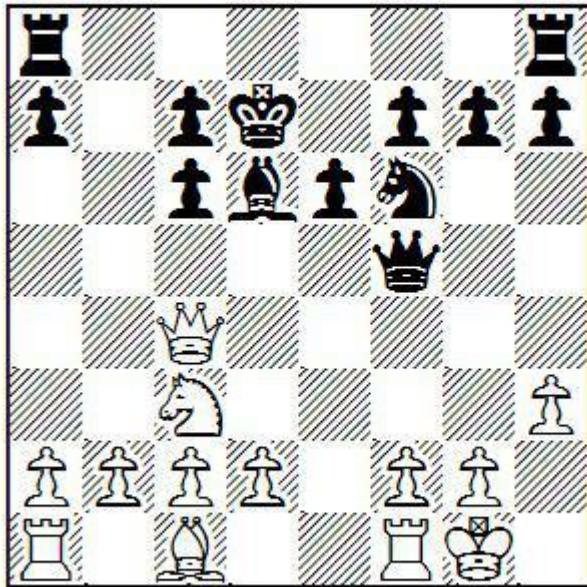
9 ... e6

Not 9 ... Qxc2?! as 10 Qc4! is annoying.

10 0-0 Bd6

After 10 ... Qxc2?! 11 Qc4, Black can now defend the pawn with 11 ... Kd7, but White has more than sufficient compensation along the c-file. If we are going to flaunt the rules by putting the king on d7, we should at least stick to the program!

11 Qc4 Kd7!?



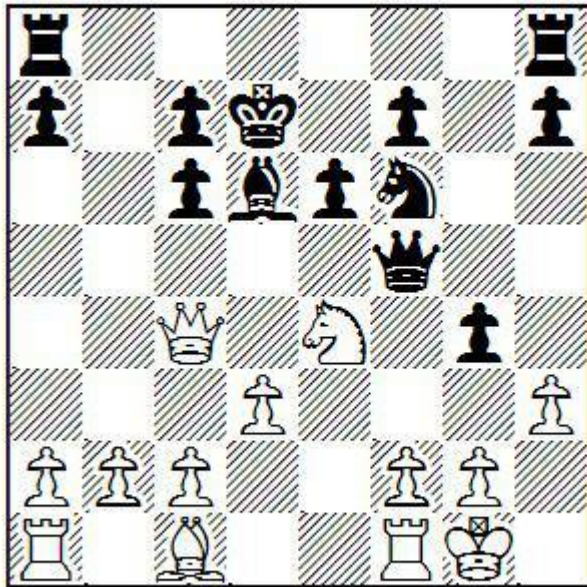
As the saying goes, “Weak pawns are only weak if they can be attacked.” Here, Black’s pawns are easily defended. Black’s position is actually quite healthy: all of her pieces are superior to their opposite numbers, and Black’s king is no less secure than White’s monarch. Normal moves in the middlegame are ... Rb8, ... g7-g5 (often prepared by ... Rg8) and ... Nd5, from where the knight can jump to f4. White has to act quickly.

Interestingly, Black’s lead in development is so impressive that she could even sacrifice the c6-pawn. In fact, despite my fond attachment to 11 ... Kd7, this is objectively stronger than the text: 11 ... 0-0! 12 d3 (12 Qxc6? Qxc2 is good for Black) 12 ... Rab8!? 13 Qxc6 Qe5 (or 13 ... Rb6!? 14 Qf3 Qxf3 15 gxf3 Rc6!, also with full compensation) 14 g3 h5! with ... h5-h4 to follow. Note that 15 Bf4? would be huge mistake on account of 15 ... Qf5! with a double attack on h3 and b2.

12 d3 g5!?

12 ... Rab8 13 a3 g5 etc is given as the move-order in some databases. I honestly can’t remember which is correct, but if this was the case, Black then had an additional option of 13 ... Qe5!? 14 g3 h5 with chances for both sides.

13 Ne4 g4!



This was my idea behind the entire set-up. White hasn't even had time to finish her development before Black launches a crude but venomous kingside barrage.

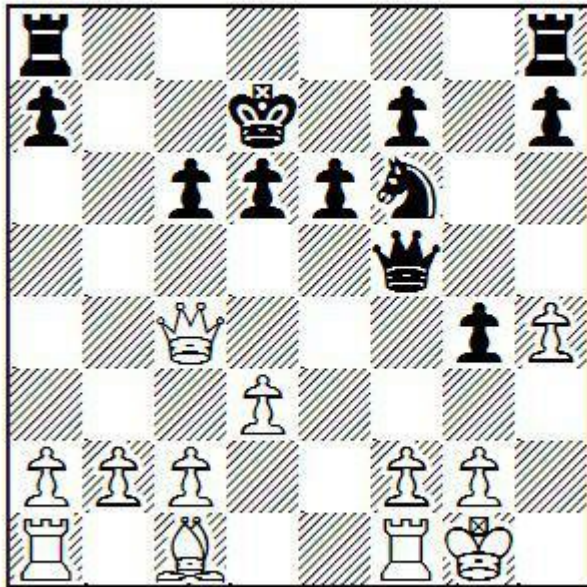
14 Nxd6

White wisely decides to swap off one of Black's dangerous attacking pieces, at the cost of rectifying Black's structure.

Taking the pawn is dangerous: 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Qxg4 (15 hxg4 Qh4 16 g3 invites a draw by perpetual check, though I see no reason why Black shouldn't play for more with 16 ... Qh3!) 15 ... Rag8 16 Qh5 Rg6 with a very strong attack down the g-file.

14 ... cxd6 15 h4

I prefer Black in this position, even if things are objectively level. Black has more space and the knight is somewhat more flexible in the closed position, but White has weathered the initial assault and is only a few moves away from full development.



15 ... Rab8

I should have directed the attention of both rooks to the queenside: 15 ... Rhb8 16 a3 a5 17 b3 (White has no useful break in the position; 17 f3?! is met by 17 ... g3!) 17 ... Rb5 is sound, and 18 a4?? drops a pawn or two to 18 ... Rc5!.

16 a3 Nd5 17 Qd4! a6 18 Qa4 Nc7 19 g3 Rb5?!

It was a small mistake to try to 'provoke' c2-c4. I wanted to use the d4-square, but 19 ... h5 was better with a view to gaining space via ... f7-f6 and ... e6-e5.

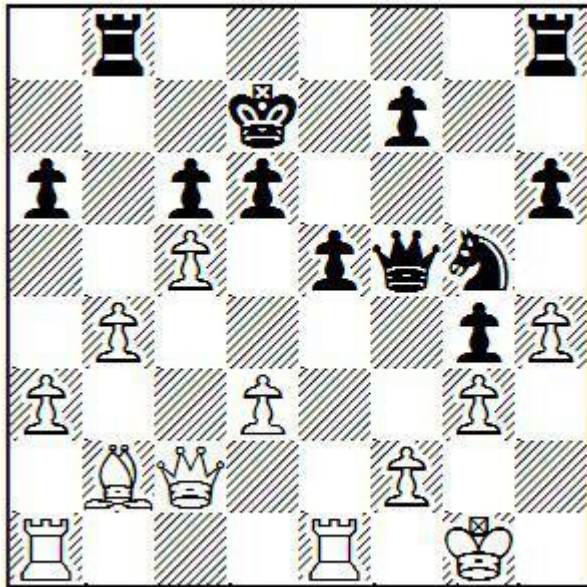
20 c4 Rb7

As we will see, it would have been much better to put the rook back on b8!

21 Qc2 e5 22 b4 Ne6 23 Bb2

White has gained space on the queenside and, although the position is still close to equal, it is hard to suggest a useful plan for Black. Consequently, I felt forced to come up with a creative way to change the nature of the game.

23 ... h6!? 24 Rfe1 Rbb8 25 c5 Ng5!!



Naturally, this was the only way to make sense of my obscure previous moves. Black launches an all-or-nothing assault on the white king – but only if the knight sacrifice is accepted!

26 cxd6

Accepting the knight is critical, but risky: 26 hxg5 hxg5 27 Re3 (27 Qe2 Qf3! is strong – it is surprising how long modern engines take to appreciate this rather obvious idea!) 27 ... Rh3 28 Kg2 (not 28 Kf1?? Rbh8 29 cxd6 Rh1+ 30 Ke2 Qxf2+!! 31 Kxf2 R8h2 mate) 28 ... d5 29 Qe2 (or 29 Bxe5 d4! 30 Bxd4 Qd5+ 31 Re4 f5) 29 ... f6 30 Rg1 Rbh8 with dangerous compensation for the piece.

26 ... Nf3+ 27 Kf1 Nxe1 28 Rxe1

Black's ambition has paid off in the form of an exchange. Unfortunately, I failed to make the proper mental transition from offence to defence and quickly fell apart.

28 ... Rb5

28 ... Rhe8 29 Qc4 a5! would have kept Black in the driver's seat.

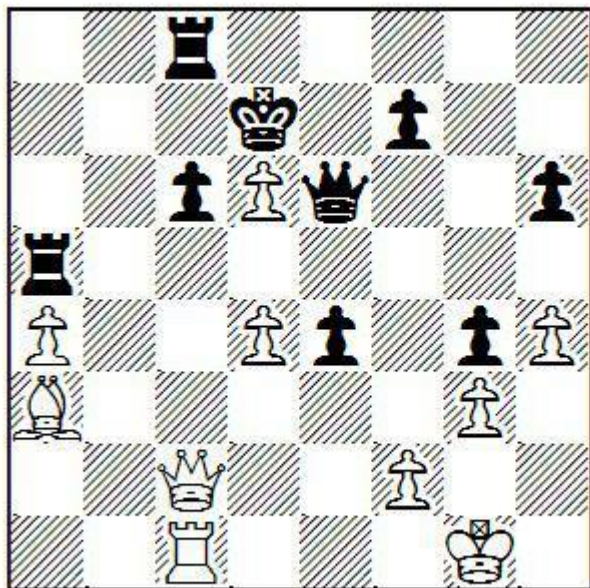
29 Kg1 a5?!

I still wanted to attack, but opening up in front of my own king was definitely not called for! Although 29 ... Kxd6 looks risky, in the harsh light of engine analysis, it turns out that Black has little to fear.

30 Rc1 Rc8 31 bxa5 Qe6?

Here 31 ... Rxa5! is strong; Black can keep the white queen out by 32 Qb3 Rb5!.

32 d4 e4 33 a4 Rxa5 34 Ba3



34 ... Qd5??

A horrible, time-trouble-induced blunder. 34 ... e3! 35 Bc5 Raa8 36 Re1 Qg6! keeps equal chances; e.g. 37 Rxe3!? Qxc2 38 Re7+ Kd8 39 Bb6+ Rc7 40 Bxc7+ Kc8 41 Re8+ Kb7 42 Rxa8 Qd1+ 43 Kh2 Qxd4 44 Rb8+ Ka6 45 Ra8+ with a draw.

35 Qb2!

Black cannot prevent the enemy queen's invasion, and suddenly White is winning.

35 ... c5

35 ... Ra7 fails to 36 Bc5!.

36 dxc5 Raxc5 37 Bxc5 Rxc5 38 Rxc5 Qxc5 39 Qb7+

39 Qb5+?? would throw away the win, as the pawn ending is drawn: 39 ... Qxb5 40 axb5 Kxd6 41 Kf1 Kc5 42 Ke2 Kxb5 43 Ke3 f5 44 Kf4 Kc4 45 Kxf5 Kd3 46 Kxg4 Ke2 etc.

39 ... Kxd6 40 Qxe4

With the time control reached, the rest is trivial.

40 ... Qc1+ 41 Kg2 Qd1 42 a5 Qa1 43 Qa8 Kc7 44 a6 Qb1 45 Qa7+ Kc8 46 Qxf7 Kb8 47 Qb7+ 1-0

Game 21

J.Emms-D.Smerdon

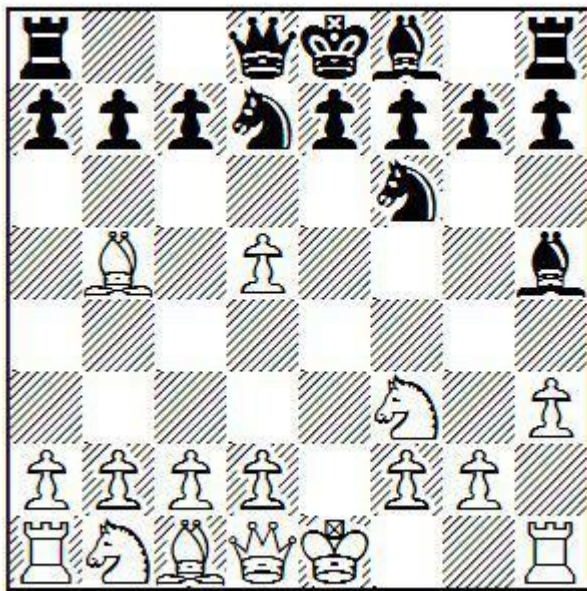
British League 2013

At the time, this was an important game for my club (Guildford) in the Four Nations Chess League. However, it was during the post mortem that I got to know John, the editor at Everyman, which was later to lead to this very book project. So I guess one could argue that without this game, you might well not be reading this right now!

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 Bb5+ Nbd7 5 h3!

This nuance is the real point behind the modern treatment.

5 ... Bh5!



Not usually the right square for the bishop in our system, but this is a position in which I had a very specific idea in mind.

6 c4

Critical, and the choice of most grandmasters. White uses the tempo saved on d2-d4 to secure the extra pawn. For the popular 6 Nc3 see the next game (Adair-Smerdon).

6 ... e6!

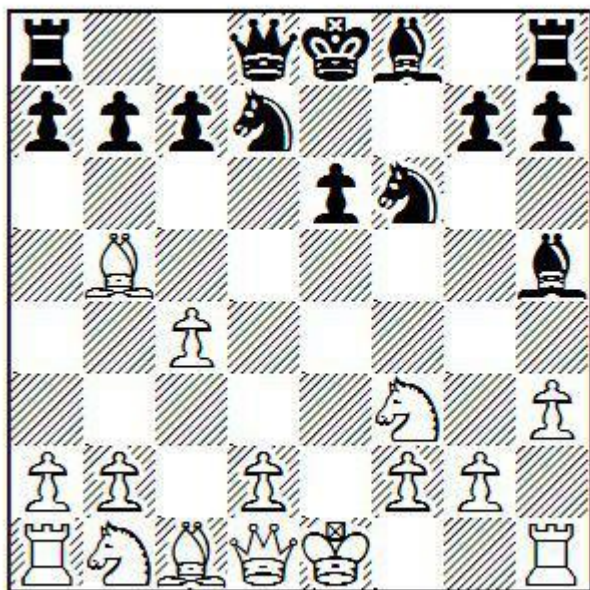
Rare, but good! 6 ... a6!? had been my choice in the past, which looks natural, but Black may well prefer to keep the option of kicking the bishop with a pin-breaking ... c7-c6 instead. Still, Black will certainly obtain reasonable compensation for the pawn. Play might continue: 7 Ba4 (7 Bxd7+ Qxd7 8 g4!? is interesting) 7 ... b5 8 cxb5 Nxd5 9 d4 (here 9 Nc3 N5b6 10 Bc2 axb5 11 g4 Bg6 12 Nxb5 e6

gives Black very promising compensation; but 9 0-0! N5b6 10 Bb3 e6 11 bxa6 Rxa6! 12 d4 Be7 only offers practical compensation for the pawn – with best play it should prove insufficient) 9 ... e6 10 g4!? (always a risky decision) 10 ... Bg6 11 Nc3 Bb4 12 Bd2 N5b6 13 Bc2 Bxc3 14 Bxc3 axb5 15 Ne5?! Nd5 16 Bd3?? Nxe5! 0-1 A.Pecori-D.Smerdon, Melbourne 2004.

7 dxe6!

The first new move. It makes sense to capture, as 7 Nc3 exd5 8 cxd5 Qe7+ 9 Qe2 Bxf3 10 gxf3 0-0-0 was better for Black in K.Landa-K.Vafiadis, European Club Cup, Kallithea 2008; while after 7 Qe2, the easiest solution is the as-yet unplayed 7 ... Bxf3! 8 gxf3 Be7 with very good compensation. Finally, 7 g4!? is a typical computer suggestion, although Black must have decent compensation after such a weakening commitment by White.

7 ... fxe6



An interesting position has arisen in which Black's attacking chances should not be underestimated. The immediate threat is ... c7-c6 followed by ... Ne5, increasing the pressure on f3. If White breaks the pin by g2-g4, Black should always keep on the lookout for a knight sacrifice on g4 to smash open the white defences. With

subsequent play along the lines of ... 0-0 and ... Qe8-h5, Black threatens to build up an overwhelming attack.

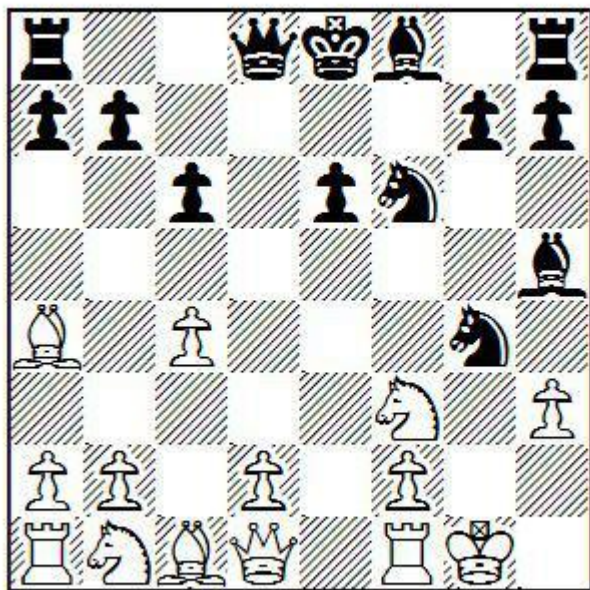
8 d4

There are several possibilities for White here, but the exact move-orders aren't as important as appreciating Black's dynamic compensation and particularly her attacking potential. White needs to be very careful over the next couple of moves just to stay afloat.

a) 8 Nc3? c6 illustrates the benefits of delaying ... a7-a6. Black gains a tempo on the white bishop and releases her d7-knight from the pin: 9 Ba4 Ne5 10 g4? (10 Qe2 Bd6 is better, but also leaves Black on top) 10 ... Nd3+ 11 Kf1 Bg6 with a crushing position.

b) 8 g4?! c6! 9 Ba4?! (here 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 gxh5 Nxh5 is better, though White will forever lack a safe haven for her king) 9 ... Nxg4!! 10 hxg4 Bxg4 11 Qe2 (or 11 Rg1 h5!) 11 ... Nc5!, threatening ... Qf6, with a clear advantage to Black.

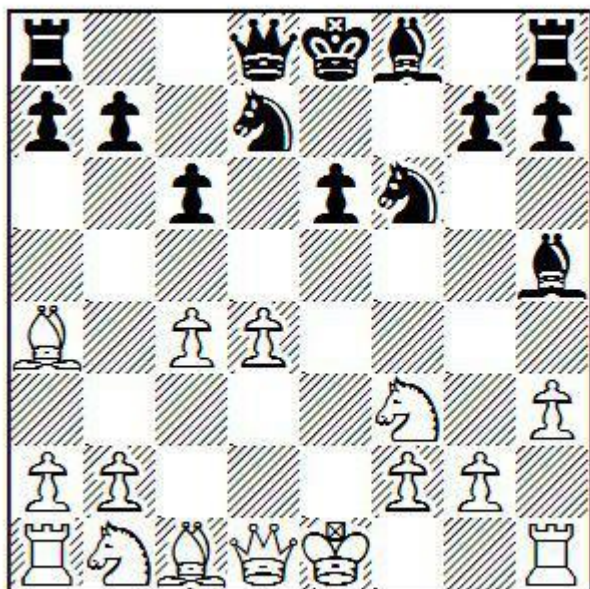
c) 8 0-0 c6! 9 Ba4 Ne5 (instead, 9 ... e5! is simple and sound; e.g. 10 d3 Bc5 with excellent compensation for the pawn) 10 g4 Nexg4!? looks tempting.



Indeed, the sacrifice is extremely strong if it is accepted. Unfortunately, White can counter with a piece sacrifice of her own, although it requires such precise play that this line may well be worth

the gamble: 11 Qe2! (after 11 hxg4?! Bxg4 12 Bc2 Bd6 13 d4 0-0 14 Qd3 Qe8!, Black has a powerful attack) 11 ... Nh6 12 Qxe6+ Be7 13 Ng5! Qa5 14 Bxc6+ Kf8 15 Bd5! Nxd5 16 Qe5! Bxg5 17 Qxg5 Be2 18 Re1 Bxc4 19 b3 with a strong initiative for White.

8 ... c6 9 Ba4



9 ... Nb6?!

This works out well in the game but should have allowed White to take control. Black had two stronger options.

a) 9 ... Qc7! is my preferred choice. Black prepares to castle queenside and then begin active operations in the centre; for example, 10 Nc3 0-0-0 11 0-0 (or 11 g4 Bg6, followed by ... e6-e5) 11 ... e5! 12 d5 e4! 13 g4 exf3 14 gxh5 Ne5! with dangerous attacking chances.

b) 9 ... e5!? is interesting too: 10 0-0 (or 10 g4 Nxg4 11 hxg4 Bxg4 with an initiative) 10 ... Bxf3 11 Qxf3 exd4 and, amazingly, there doesn't seem to be a way for White to prevent Black from continuing ... Be7 and ... 0-0, with a perfectly acceptable position.

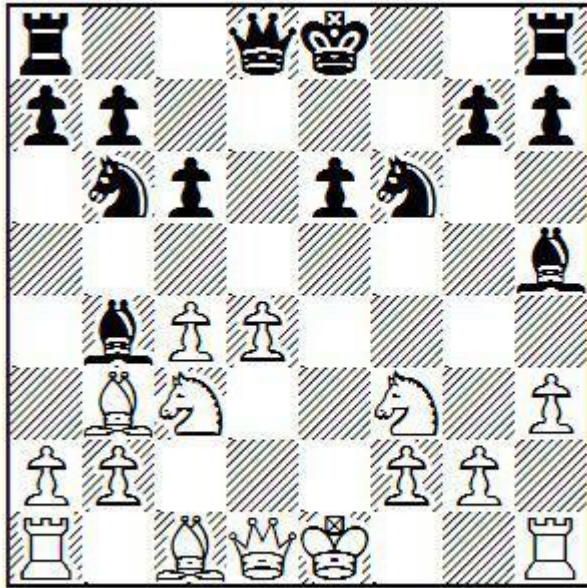
10 Bb3

Here 10 g4! was strong, as 10 ... Nxg4? 11 hxg4 Bxg4 12 Bc2 Qf6 13 Be4 isn't enough. Black would have to play 10 ... Nxa4 11 Qxa4 Bg6 with reasonable compensation.

10 ... Bb4+

10 ... Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Qxd4 12 0-0 Bc5 was another option.

11 Nc3



11 ... 0-0?!

After 11 ... Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Qxd4 etc, White can claim a small structural advantage due to the weakness on e6, but Black's pieces are active and her rooks will soon find easy work on the f- and d-files.

12 Be3?!

Mutual blindness. 12 g4! was again powerful, as the sacrifice is dubious: 12 ... Nxg4 13 hxg4 Bxg4 14 Qc2! Rxf3 15 Qxh7+ Kf7 16 Be3 Qf6 17 0-0-0 and White is better.

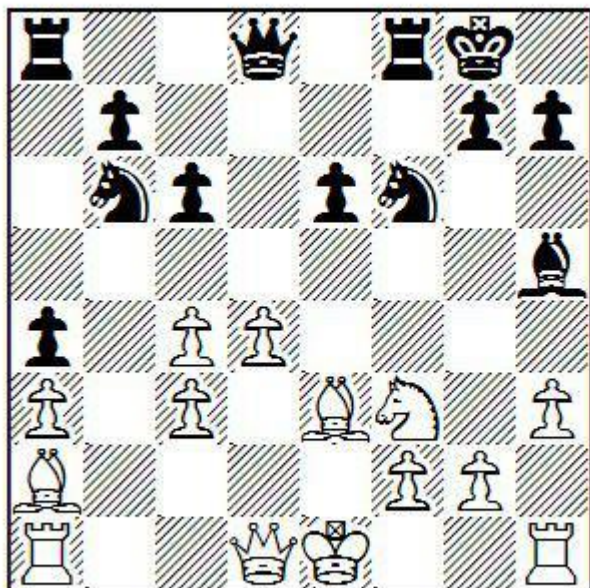
12 ... a5

Alternatively:

a) 12 ... Bxf3!? 13 Qxf3 (or 13 gxf3 Nh5 with compensation) 13 ... Nfd5 14 Qg4! Nxe3 15 fxe3 Qe7, followed by ... a7-a5, gives Black decent play.

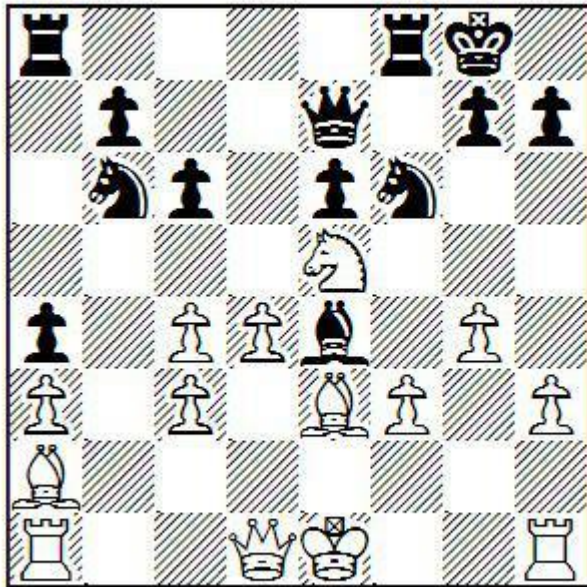
b) 12 ... Ne4! 13 Qc2 Bg6 14 Qc1 looks like it gets Black nowhere, but the sneaky 14 ... Bh5!, offering a repetition, gives Black good chances. Note that both 15 Nd2 and 15 Ne5 are met by the surprisingly powerful sacrifice 15 ... Rxf2!!.

13 a3 Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 a4 15 Ba2



White has handled the opening reasonably well. Black has some compensation based on White's crippled pawn structure, but objectively it is not quite sufficient. Here I could – and probably should – have taken on f3, which would have left Black with a fair amount of play: 15 ... Bxf3 16 gxf3 Nc8, bringing the knight around to f5, gives some compensation. However, I saw a 'beautiful' idea for Black, which unfortunately isn't quite sound ...

15 ... Qe7!? 16 g4! Bg6 17 Ne5 Be4 18 f3



It looks like Black is all out of options, but ...

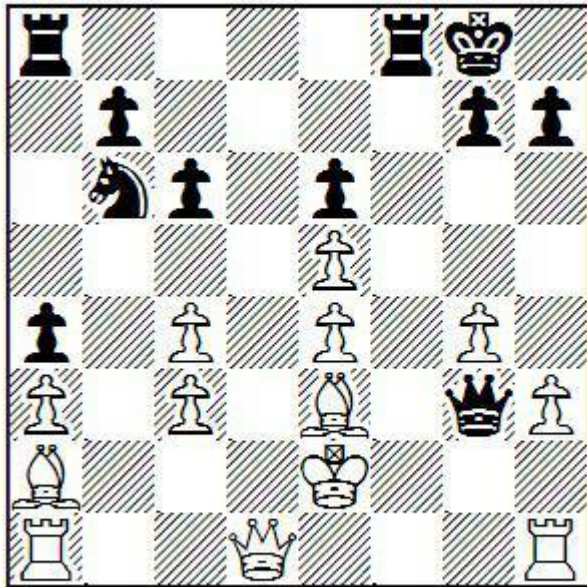
18 ... Nfd7!

A really nice move to play, and indeed the only way to make sense of Black's previous sequence.

19 fxe4?!

White mistakenly takes up the challenge, when the cool 19 0-0! was strong: 19 ... Nxe5 20 dxe5 Qh4 21 Kh2 Rad8 22 Qe1 Qxe1 23 Raxe1 Bd3! was the line my calculations followed, but White can calmly play 24 Rf2! (after 24 Bxb6 Bxf1 25 Bxd8 Rxd8, Black has a neat fork on d2 to restore the material balance) 24 ... Nxc4 25 Bc5!, securing an advantageous position after the bishop jumps into d6. Still, Black's control of the light squares and direct play against White's weak pawns offers some chances.

19 ... Nxe5 20 dxe5 Qh4+ 21 Ke2 Qg3!



Quite a pawn structure. Despite the material, Black has powerful counterchances – enough for a draw, at least.

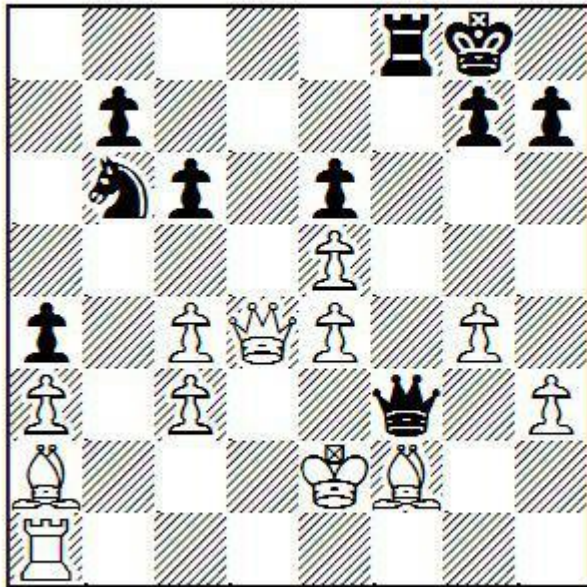
22 Rf1

22 Bxb6 was perhaps the safest choice. Then 22 ... Qg2+ 23 Kd3 Rf3+ 24 Qxf3 Qxf3+ 25 Kd2 Rf8 26 Bd4! would have forced Black to take a draw at once.

22 ... Qg2+ 23 Rf2

After 23 Kd3 Rad8+ 24 Bd4 Nd7! (Black brings in the last recruits to the attack) 25 Rxf8+ Rxf8 26 Qe2 Nxe5+ 27 Bxe5 Rf3+ 28 Kd2 Rf2 29 Re1 Rxe2+ 30 Rxe2 Qxh3, the endgame is roughly equal. White has a material advantage, but both bishops are loose, his king is exposed, and he is a long way off creating a passed pawn, whereas Black will soon have two passers on the kingside.

23 ... Rxf2+ 24 Bxf2 Rf8 25 Qd4 Qf3+



26 Ke1??

Up until here, John has kept the draw in hand, but now things go awry in time pressure.

26 Kd2! was still equal; for example, 26 ... c5 27 Qxc5 Nd7 28 Qe3 Qxf2+ 29 Qxf2 Rxf2+ 30 Ke3 Rb2 and now White can finally release his bishop from the tomb: 31 c5!! Nxc5 32 Bc4 with a level endgame.

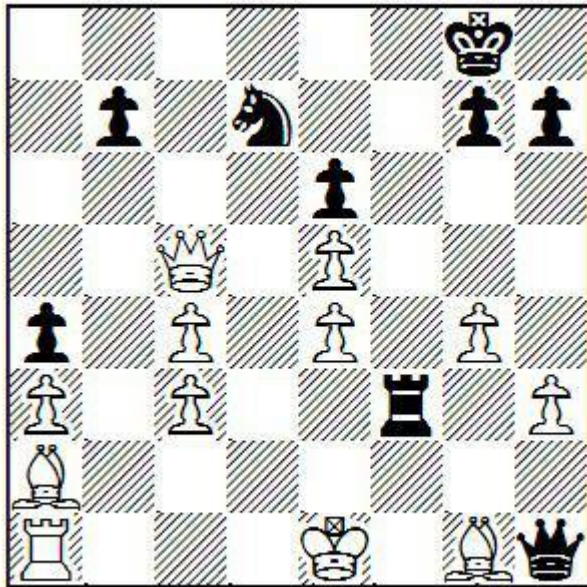
26 ... Qh1+ 27 Bg1 c5!!

Gaining an important tempo and cementing in the bishop on a2.

28 Qe3

Here 28 Qxc5 Nd7 29 Qd4 Nxe5 is crushing.

28 ... Rf3! 29 Qxc5 Nd7



After a patient wait, Black's last piece comes to join the final assault.

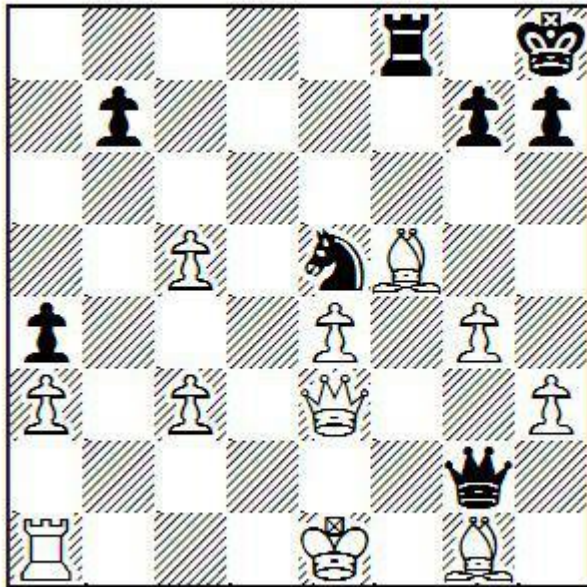
30 Qd4 Nxe5 31 c5 Rf8

31 ... Nc6! is quicker.

32 Bxe6+ Kh8 33 Qe3

33 Qxe5 Qxg1+ 34 Ke2 Qxa1 35 Kd3 Qf1+ 36 Kd4 Re8 is hopeless.

33 ... Qg2 34 Bf5



White finally closes the dangerous f-file, so Black quickly switches to a devastating final assault on the d-file.

34 ... Nf3+ 35 Kd1 Rd8+ 36 Kc1 Rd2! 37 Qxf3 Rc2+ 38 Kb1 Rb2+ 0-1

Game 22

J.Adair-D.Smerdon

British League 2014

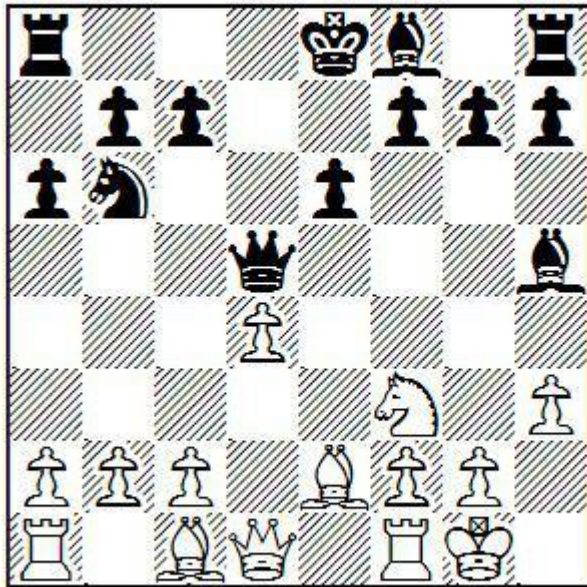
1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 Bb5+ Nbd7 5 h3!

A subtle move, provoking a decision out of Black's bishop before White commits to a structure.

5 ... Bh5 6 Nc3!

It quickly became clear that my young, talented opponent had thoroughly prepared for our encounter. He blitzed out this line for White that has been recommended by several authors, and of which I was aware. This game was thus a perfect opportunity to test out the fruits from my home analysis kitchen.

6 ... a6 7 Be2 Nb6 8 d4 Nfxd5 9 Nxd5 Qxd5 10 0-0 e6



11 a4!?

Here 11 b3 seems more natural, and will be the focus of the theory. The insertion of a2-a4 and ... a6-a5 does make some difference to the position. The weakening of White's queenside, and particularly the b4-square, means that she will struggle to find an advantage if the centre remains static. On the other hand, an opening of the centre, typically after White plays d4-d5, will saddle Black with weak pawns on b6 and a5. The play thus revolves around the threat of White's central push, and how Black plans to prevent or prepare for it.

Despite the fact that we will spend quite a bit of time on this position in the theory section, I should stress that it has only occurred twice in tournament play to date! A second little morsel: 11 ... Be7 12 c4 Qd8 13 Be3 0-0 14 Ne5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Nd7! 16 Rad1 Nxe5 17 dxe5 Qc8 18 Rd3 Rd8 19 Rfd1 Rxd3 20 Rxd3 with equality, J.H.Hodgson-D.Smerdon, Daventry (team rapid) 2014.

11 ... a5 12 b3 Bb4!?

12 ... Be7 13 c4 Qd8! 14 Ne5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 c6 was another possibility, but the b4-square seems a logical choice for the bishop.

13 c4 Qd8!

The typical retreat for the black queen in this variation.

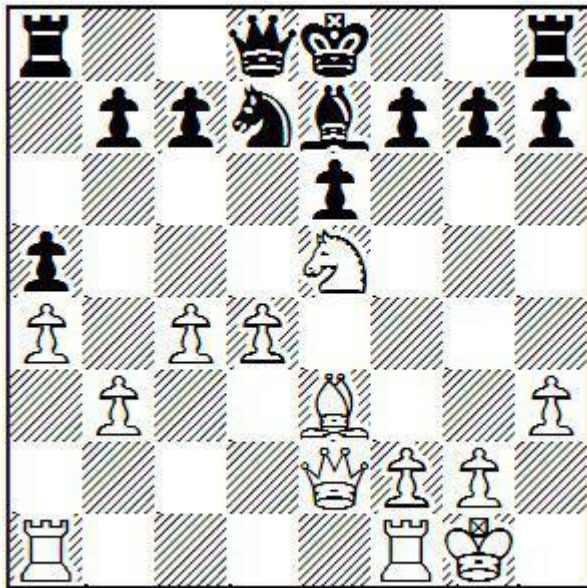
14 Bg5 Be7 15 Be3 Nd7!?

Another standard motif. Usually Black plays this move after the white knight lands on e5, but it makes little difference seeing as White can hardly do without this jump.

16 Ne5

16 d5 e5 only improves Black's structure, who has gained sizeable control over the centre and queenside dark squares.

16 ... Bxe2 17 Qxe2



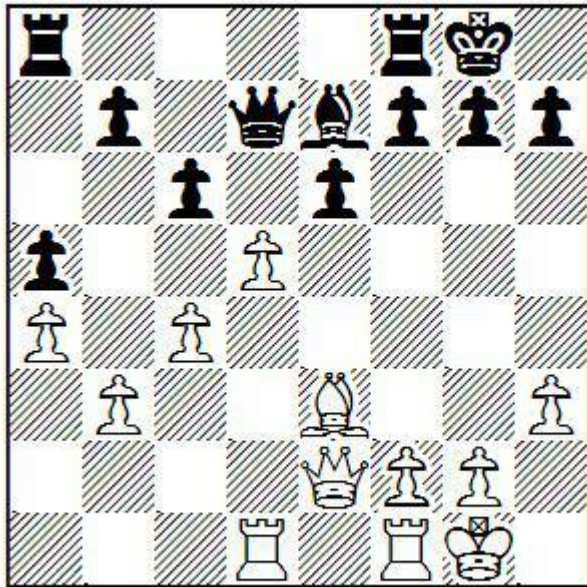
17 ... 0-0

Here 17 ... c6! is perhaps slightly more accurate, should Black wish to avoid the note to move nineteen. Then 18 Nxd7! Qxd7 19 Rad1 0-0 transposes to the game, while 18 Rad1 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Qc7 20 Qg4 0-0 21 Bg5 (or 21 Qd4 Bb4! with equal chances; and 21 Bh6!? Qxe5 22 Rd7 Bf6 is nothing special either) 21 ... Bxg5 22 Qxg5 b5 is level.

18 Rad1 c6 19 Nxd7

19 Nf3!? is an interesting attempt to take advantage of Black's inaccurate seventeenth move, though after 19 ... Nf6 (19 ... Qc7?! 20 d5 exd5 21 cxd5 is uncomfortable) 20 Rd3 Qc7 21 Rfd1 Rfd8, Black has successfully neutralized White's central pressure.

19 ... Qxd7 20 d5!



The only move to fight for an edge. Other moves promise nothing, and 20 Rd3 b5! gives Black chances to exploit White's loose queenside pawns.

20 ... cxd5

Instead, 20 ... exd5 21 cxd5 Bb4! may be best, as supported by several deep computer-simulated matches that I have run: 22 Rd3 (22 Qf3 Rad8 23 Bb6 Rc8 is equal) 22 ... Rae8! 23 Rfd1 Re7! 24 Qf3 (or 24 dxc6 Qxc6 25 Qh5 Rfe8 26 Qd5 Qc2 27 Qb5 h6 28 g3 Qe2 with equality and eventually drawn in *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, 31 Ply Shootout 2015) 24 ... Rfe8 25 dxc6 Qxc6 26 Qxc6 bxc6 27 Rc1 c5 28 Rc4 Rc7 29 Rd5 Rec8 30 Bf4 Ra7 31 Bd2 Ba3 32 Be3 Rac7 and White cannot make any progress, *Houdini 4 Pro x64-Houdini 4 Pro x64*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.

21 cxd5 exd5

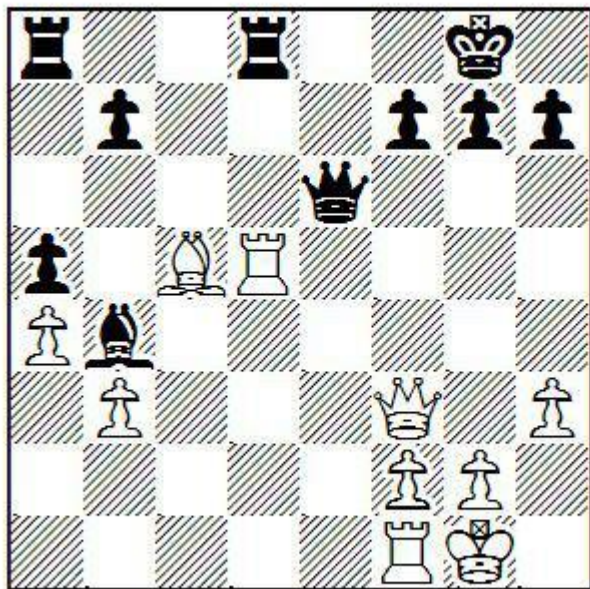
21 ... Bb4!? gets the bishop off of its loose post and sets about favourable simplifications; for example, 22 Qg4! (22 d6 Ra6! is good for Black, as the d6-pawn is suddenly vulnerable; and 22 Rd3 e5! is a favourable transformation) 22 ... Rac8 (22 ... f5?! is tricky, but after the accurate 23 Qc4! e5 24 d6+ Rf7 25 Qd5!, White stands better) 23 dxe6 Qxe6 24 Qxe6 fxe6 25 Rd7 Rf7 26 Rfd1 Rxd7 27 Rxd7 Rc3

28 Bd4 Rc1+ 29 Kh2 Rc7! and thanks to this neat trick, Black has everything covered.

22 Qf3 Bb4

22 ... Qc6 23 Rxd5 Rfd8 is a solid alternative.

23 Rxd5 Qe6 24 Bc5! Rfd8



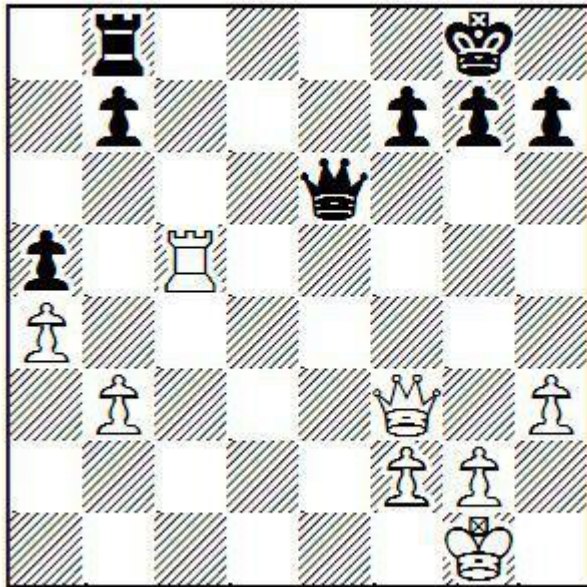
25 Rfd1

I had calculated the long and quirky variation 25 Rxd8+ Rxd8 26 Bxb4 axb4 27 Qxb7 Qxb3 28 a5 g6! 29 a6 Qa2 30 a7 b3 31 Qb8 Rf8 32 Re1 b2 to an impasse where neither side can make progress.

25 ... Rxd5 26 Rxd5

26 Qxd5? Bxc5! 27 Qxc5 Qxb3 and Black wins a pawn.

26 ... Bxc5 27 Rxc5 Rb8!



Making use of the indirect protection of a5 due to the check on e1. Not 27 ... Rc8 28 Qd1! b6 29 Rxc8+ Qxc8 30 Qd6! and White wins the b6-pawn.

28 h4?

Here 28 Rb5! would have put Black's position under unpleasant pressure: 28 ... b6 29 Qf4 Rd8! (29 ... Rb7? 30 b4! wins a pawn) 30 Qc7 Rd1+ 31 Kh2 Qd6+ 32 Qxd6 Rxd6 featured in my calculations, though I overlooked the elementary trick 33 b4! g6 (33 ... axb4? 34 a5! leads to a win for White: 34 ... Kf8! 35 axb6 Rd8 36 Rxb4 Rb8 37 Kg3 Ke7 38 b7! Kd6 39 Rg4! etc) 34 bxa5 bxa5 35 Rxa5 Rd2 36 Kg3 Ra2, leading to a technically drawn rook endgame, as long as Black knows her stuff. Further details on this seminal endgame can be found in any good endgame text, such as *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*, or in a series of online articles by Dvoretsky at ChessCafe.com entitled 'Theoretical Discoveries'.

28 ... h6

Now, without fear of back-rank tricks, Black has successfully solved the last remaining problems.

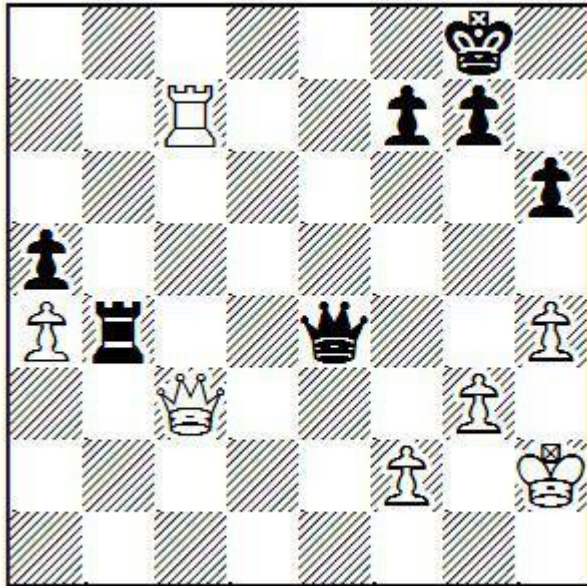
29 Rc7

Occupying the seventh rank is natural, but alas, the action is soon to be held elsewhere ...

29 ... b5! 30 Qc3?!

It was time for White to take defensive measures: 30 axb5 Qe1+ 31 Kh2 Qe5+ 32 Qg3 Qxg3+ 33 Kxg3 Rxb5 34 Rc3 with a draw.

30 ... bxa4 31 bxa4 Rb1+! 32 Kh2 Rb4 33 g3 Qe4



White is under pressure. Black's activity has seemingly appeared out of thin air.

34 Rc8+

34 Qd2! was soundest.

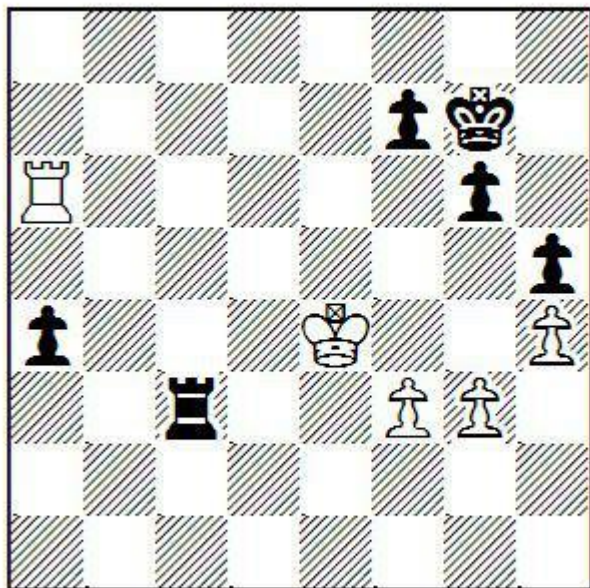
34 ... Kh7 35 Qc2 Rxa4 36 Qxe4+ Rxe4 37 Ra8 Re5!

Black has managed to maintain the activity of his rook by defending the pawn from the side, in contrast to the well-known theoretically drawn positions with the rook in front of the pawn (compare the note to 28 h4 above). This makes White's defence significantly more difficult. We have of course moved far, far beyond the realms of opening significance, so feel free to skip ahead. On the other hand, readers with a curiosity for endgame theory and technique may find what follows of interest.

38 Ra6 g6 39 Kg2 Kg7 40 Kf3 Kf8 41 Ra7!

White should endeavour to make Black's king activation as difficult as possible.

41 ... Ke8 42 Kf4 Rb5 43 f3 Kf8 44 Ke4 Kg7 45 Ra6 Rb4+ 46 Ke5 Rb3 47 Kf4 Rb4+ 48 Ke5 a4 49 Ra7 h5 50 Ra6 Rb3 51 Kf4 Rb4+ 52 Ke5 Rc4 53 Kd5 Rc3 54 Ke4



54 ... Ra3

White has defended very defiantly, and I felt obliged to transfer my rook to a less preferable location in front of my own pawn.

54 ... a3!? was another option, though also insufficient to win. One sample line is 55 Kf4 Kf8 56 Ra7 Ke8 57 g4 Kd8 58 gxh5 (not 58 Rxf7?? Rc4+ 59 Kg5 Ra4! etc) 58 ... gxh5 59 Kg5 with a draw.

55 Kf4?

55 g4! was the route to the draw: 55 ... hxg4 56 fxg4 Ra1 57 Kf3! a3 58 Kg2! a2 59 Ra7! (not 59 Kh2?? f5! and wins) 59 ... Kh6 60 Ra6! and Black cannot create a passed f-pawn.

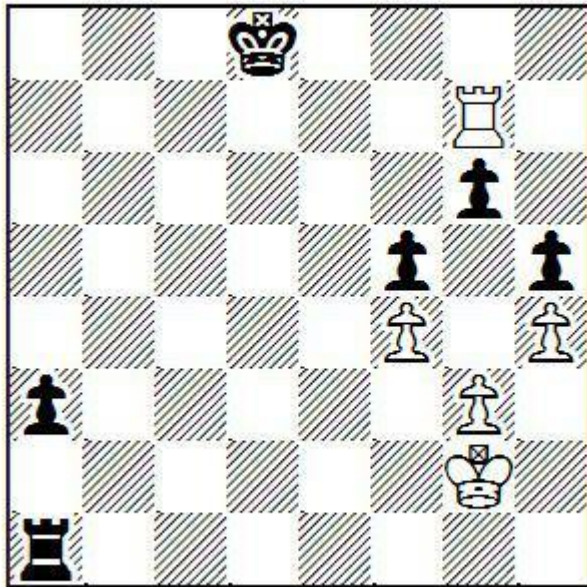
55 ... Ra1! 56 Ke3 Ra2 57 Kf4 a3 58 Ke3 Ra1 59 Kf2 Kf8 60 Ra7 Ke8 61 f4

Desperately seeking counterplay on the kingside. 61 Kg2 Kd8 62 Rxf7 Ra2+ 63 Kh3 Rf2 64 f4 Kc8 65 Ra7 Rf3 wins for Black.

61 ... f5

Simply 61 ... Kd8 62 Kg2 (or 62 Rxf7? a2 63 Ra7 Rh1!) 62 ... Kc8 63 Rxf7 Kb8! is winning.

62 Kg2 Kd8 63 Rg7



63 ... Ra2+?

The first of a series of mistakes that will eventually allow White to steal back half a point. 63 ... Rc1! 64 Ra7 Rc2+ 65 Kf3 Rc3+ 66 Kf2 Kc8 was an easy win.

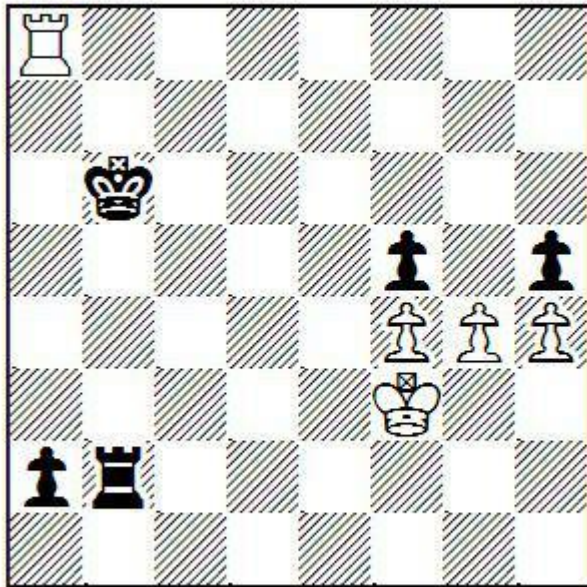
64 Kf3 Ra1 65 Kg2 Kc8? 66 Rxg6 Kb7 67 Rg7+ Kb6 68 Rg8 Ra2+

Again 68 ... Rc1! wins.

69 Kf3 Rb2?

It is crucial that Black leaves the b2-square free for his king: 69 ... Rc2 70 Ra8 a2 and White is helpless; for example, 71 g4 (or 71 Ke3 Kc5! 72 Kd3 Rg2 and wins) 71 ... hxg4+ 72 Kg3 Kb5 73 h5 Kb4 74 Rb8+ (or 74 h6 Rc3+ 75 Kg2 Ra3 etc) 74 ... Kc3 75 Rc8+ Kb2 76 Rb8+ Kc1 77 Ra8 Kb1 and the pawn promotes.

70 Ra8 a2 71 g4!



71 ... fxg4+??

The final mistake. 71 ... hxg4+ was still winning: 72 Kg3 Kb5 73 h5 Kb4 74 Rb8+ Kc4 75 Ra8 Kb3 76 h6 Rb1 77 h7 Rh1 78 Rb8+ Kc4 79 Rc8+ Kd5 80 Rd8+ Ke6 81 Re8+ Kf7 82 Ra8 Rxh7 83 Rxa2 Rh3+ 84 Kg2 Rf3 85 Ra4 Kg6 etc.

72 Kg3 Kc5 73 f5! Kd6 74 f6 Ke6 75 Ra6+ Kf7 76 Kf4 Rf2+ 77 Kg3 Rxf6 78 Rxa2

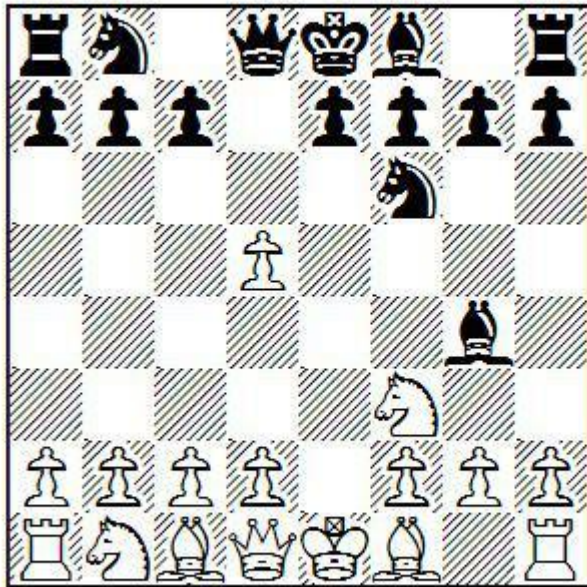
With a pair of h-pawns, rather than f-pawns, Black cannot make progress.

78 ... Rf3+ 79 Kg2 Rh3 80 Ra7+ Ke6 81 Ra6+ Kd7 82 Ra7+ Kc6 83 Ra6+ Kb7 84 Rd6 Rxh4 85 Rd3! Kc6 86 Ra3 ½-½

Impressive endgame technique by the talented young Englishman, and a fair result.

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nf3 Bg4



We will now consider:

A: 4 c4!? (the Goulash)

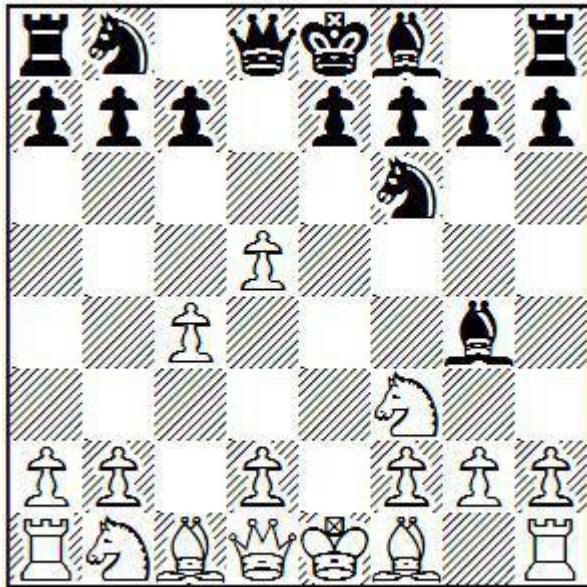
B: 4 Be2 (the Celeriac)

C: 4 Bb5+! (Charlie's Choice)

Note that 4 d4 transposes back to the Classical system (3 d4 Bg4 4 Nf3) and is actually a more common move-order to get there.

White's other options hardly pose a threat: 4 Nc3 and 4 Bc4 lead to inferior versions of the harmless 3 Nc3 variation in Section Five; while 4 h3 Bxf3 5 Qxf3 Qxd5 6 Qxd5 Nxd5 is quite an unambitious line that leads to a balanced endgame. White's bishop pair is ineffective in the short term. After 7 d4, the prosaic 7 ... e6 led to a nice victory in G.Lane-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2010, but 7 ... Nc6 8 c3 e5! is stronger, with chances to take over the initiative. 7 Nc3 is just equal after 7 ... e6, 7 ... c6, or the gallant 7 ... Nb4!?

A: 4 c4!? – The Goulash



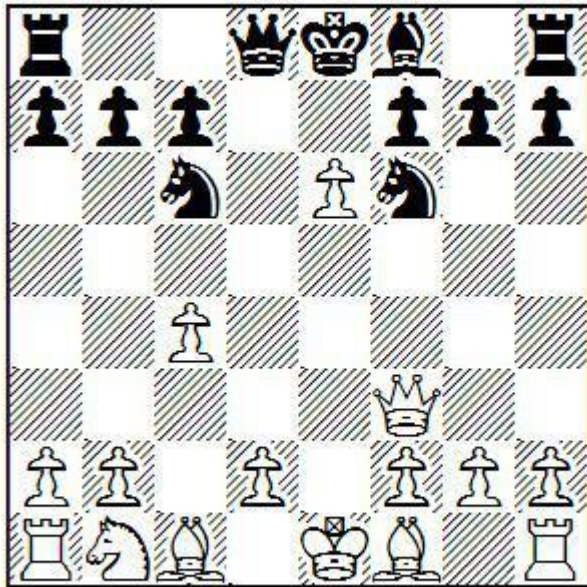
This move was a proposed refutation by the esteemed Hungarian trainer IM Laszlo Hazai. A week after I trained with him in Budapest, his student, GM Krisztian Szabo, played this variation against me at a tournament in a small town in central Hungary. The tournament was a disaster for me, but the company and the culture made up for it, and the goulash was out of this world. Given that I dropped thirty points in the event, it's little wonder the food is the main memory I've chosen to keep ...

Krisztian achieved a slight advantage in our game and I was forced to dig deep to earn half a point, but we shall see that Black has a powerful and exciting improvement.

4 ... e6 5 dxe6

Here, 5 ... Nc6 6 Be2 fxe6 was the routine continuation of Kr.Szabo-D.Smerdon, Paks 2007, but Black can improve with the surprising novelty:

5 ... Bxf3!! 6 Qxf3 Nc6!!



This is much more in the spirit of our opening! The voluntary exchange on f3 is unique to our system, but here it has a very concrete point: Black now has a fantastic outpost on the d4-square, while White's queen will find herself cut off from retreat if she plays Be2, after which her majesty will be relentlessly hunted around the board.

This line is still untested in tournament play, but I have had the chance to try it out many times in blitz and rapid chess. From both these games and my own analysis, I have concluded that Black has dangerous and fully sufficient compensation for the material.

7 exf7+

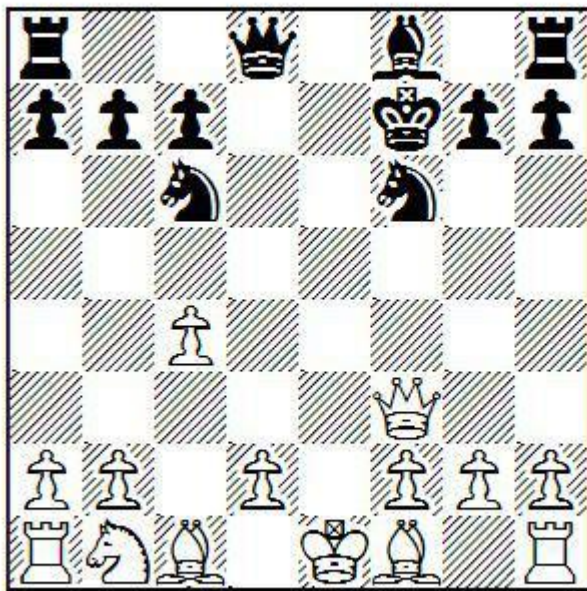
White will most likely have to make this move sooner or later. Otherwise:

a) 7 d3 Nd4 8 Qd1 Qe7! gives Black an excellent position.

b) 7 Nc3 Nd4 8 Qd1 was tried against me in a blitz game, which continued 8 ... Bc5 (again 8 ... Qe7! is stronger: 9 Be2 Qxe6 10 0-0 0-0-0 with full compensation) 9 d3 0-0 10 Be3 Re8? (10 ... Nxe6! was correct) 11 exf7+ (the right moment) 11 ... Kxf7 12 a3?? (12 Be2! would leave Black struggling to justify her sacrifices) 12 ... Nf5! and Black is winning, *Linkmus* (2450)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012.

7 ... Kxf7

Black is two pawns down, but her pieces are about to spring to life, while White's only developed piece – her foolhardy queen – will soon find herself a target for Black's pieces. In particular, the d4 outpost and the recklessly open e-file are just begging to be exploited by the black forces. Despite her material advantage, White's position is already precarious, and one false step over the next few moves could easily spell an immediate downfall. Even with best play, White can hope for equality at most.



White has three acceptable continuations, of which the best is not at all obvious:

A1: 8 Be2

A2: 8 Qd1

A3: 8 c5!

Other moves are clearly worse:

a) 8 Nc3?! Bc5! is obviously bad, with ... Re8 and ... Nd4 arriving quickly.

b) 8 d3?! Bb4+ 9 Bd2? Re8+ also gave Black a winning position in *Gigi111* (2200)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014.

c) 8 d4? (attempting to return some of the material) 8 ... Nxd4 9 Qd3 Bb4+ 10 Nc3, as in *jncool68* (2534)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012, backfires, as 10 ... Qe7+ 11 Be3 Rhd8! is completely winning for Black.

A1: 8 Be2 Bc5 9 0-0 Re8!

The threat of ... Nd4 is even stronger than its execution.

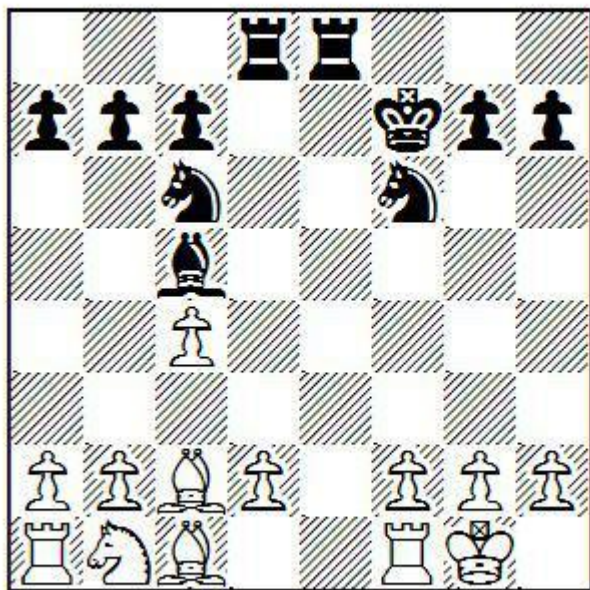
10 Qd3!

The only move, but Black's initiative persists even without the queens. Instead:

a) 10 Nc3?? Nd4 wins a piece.

b) 10 Bd1? Ne5! (heading for d3) 11 Qxb7 Rb8 12 Qa6 Qd4 and a quick mate is imminent; e.g. 13 h3 Nf3+, followed by 14 ... Re1!!.

10 ... Qxd3 11 Bxd3 Rad8 12 Bc2

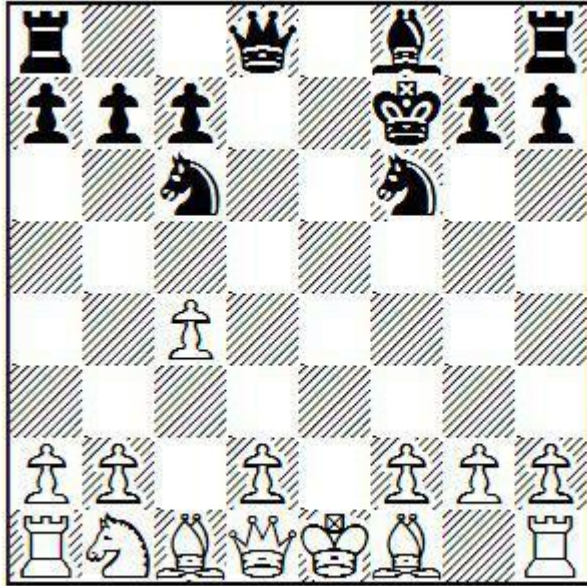


Black has full compensation and several good continuations in this endgame, depending on your preference for risk:

a) 12 ... Nb4 13 Bf5 Ne4 (essentially forcing a draw; Black could of course comfortably keep more life in the position, e.g. 13 ... Nd3!? 14 Bxd3 Rxd3 15 Nc3 Ne4, retaining the initiative) 14 Nc3 Nxf2! 15 a3 Nfd3+ 16 Kh1 Nf2+ with a draw by perpetual check.

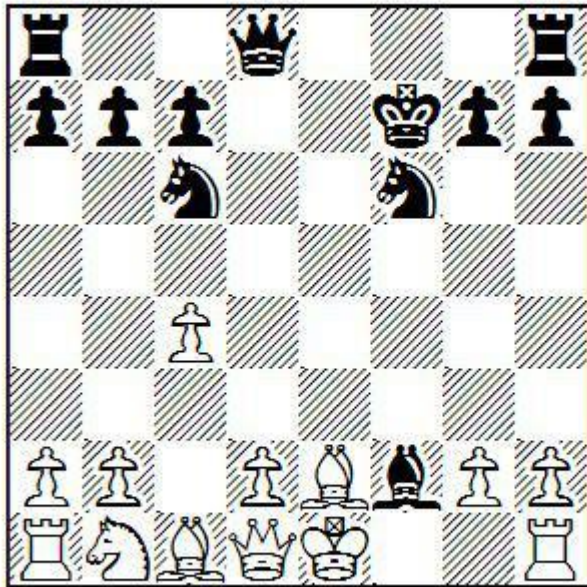
b) 12 ... Ne4 13 Bxe4 (13 Nc3 allows 13 ... Nxd2!, while 13 d3?! Nxf2! 14 Rxf2+ Kg8 15 Kf1 Bxf2 16 Kxf2 Rf8+! gives Black a surprisingly dangerous attack, despite the reduced material) 13 ... Rxe4 14 b3 Nd4 is a decent alternative.

A2: 8 Qd1



White opts to evacuate her exposed dame before developing her kingside. However, the extra tempo allows Black the chance to unleash an explosive attacking sacrifice:

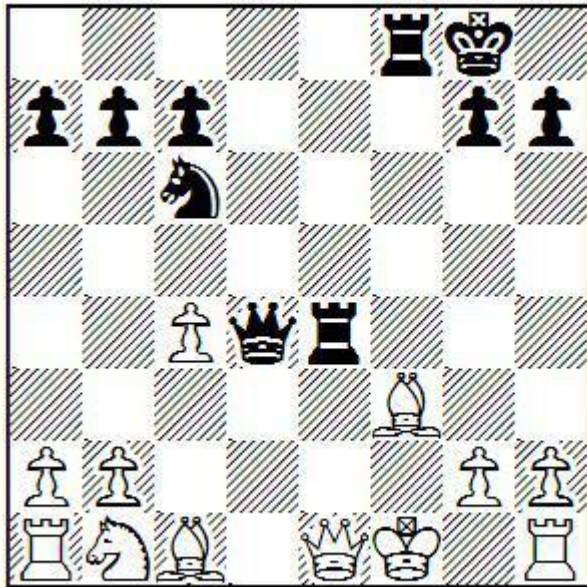
8 ... Bc5 9 Be2 Bxf2+!!



This 'coffeehouse' move launches a surprisingly powerful assault on the white king. Black certainly has a draw in hand; the only question is whether the attack is enough to win. Spoiler alert: the answer is "Yes".

10 Kxf2 Qd4+

10 ... Ne4+ is the alternative, promising a dangerous attack that should, against perfect defence by White, lead to a splitting of the point: 11 Kf1 Qd4! 12 Qe1 Rhf8 13 d3 Rae8!! 14 dxe4 Kg8+ 15 Bf3 Rxe4!

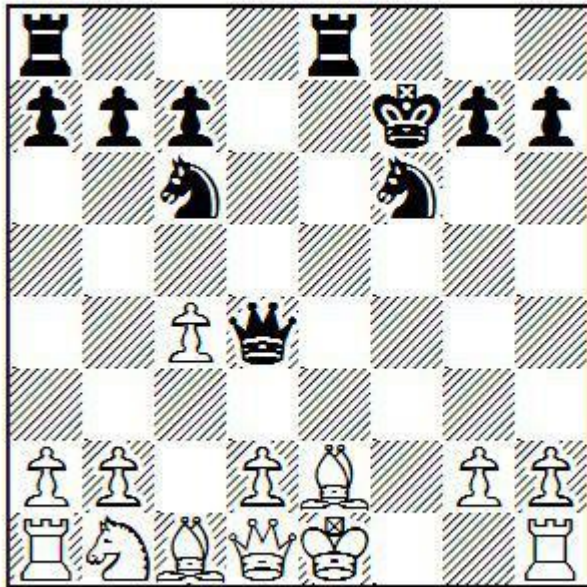


16 Qd2! (16 Qf2? Qxc4+ mates) 16 ... Qxc4+ 17 Kf2 (17 Kg1? Nd4! wins) 17 ... Qc5+ gives no more than a draw; e.g. 18 Kf1 Nd4 19 Nc3 Nxf3 20 gxf3 Rxf3+ 21 Kg2 Ref4 22 Qd5+ Qxd5 23 Nxd5 Rf2+ with perpetual check.

11 Ke1

11 Kf1?? is an immediate mistake: 11 ... Rhf8! 12 d3 Kg8 13 g3 (the only chance, as 13 Bf3? Ng4! 14 Qd2 Nce5 is completely crushing, but ...) 13 ... Ne4+! 14 Kg2 Qf2+ 15 Kh3 Qf5+! 16 Kg2 Nf2 17 Qf1 Qh3+ 18 Kg1 Qe6! wins.

11 ... Rhe8



12 Nc3!

Not 12 Rf1? Rxe2+! and wins, or 12 d3? Rxe2+! 13 Kxe2 Re8+ 14 Kf1 Ne5! with an unstoppable attack.

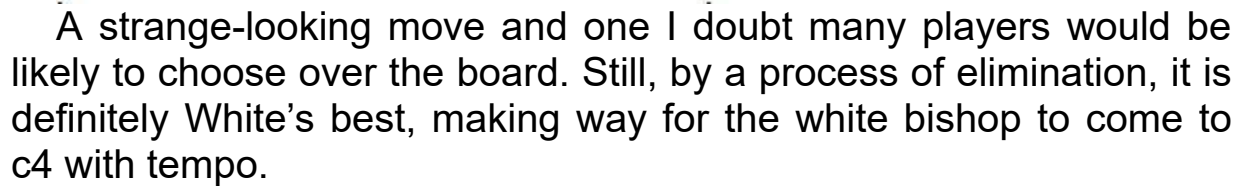
12 ... Nb4! 13 Qb3!

Still not 13 Kf1? due to 13 ... Nd3! 14 Bxd3 Qxd3+ 15 Kf2 (or 15 Kg1) 15 ... Qd4+ 16 Kf1 Re5!! 17 g4 Kg8!! and wins.

13 ... Nd3+ 14 Kd1 Nf2+ 15 Kc2 Nxh1

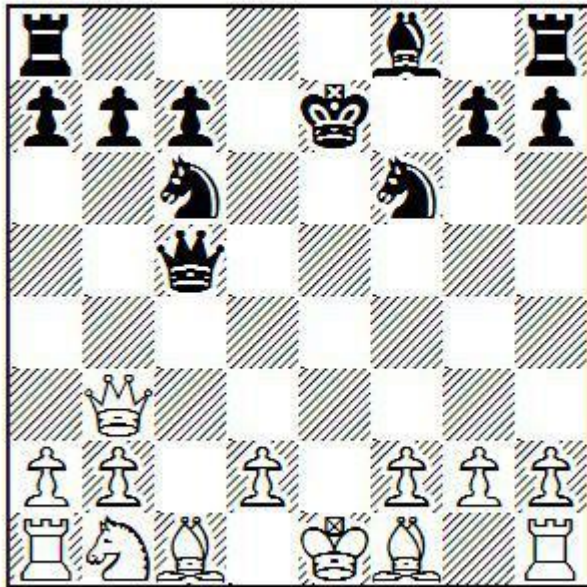
Although White has avoided mate, she is now behind on material and still has lasting problems with her king.

A3: 8 c5!



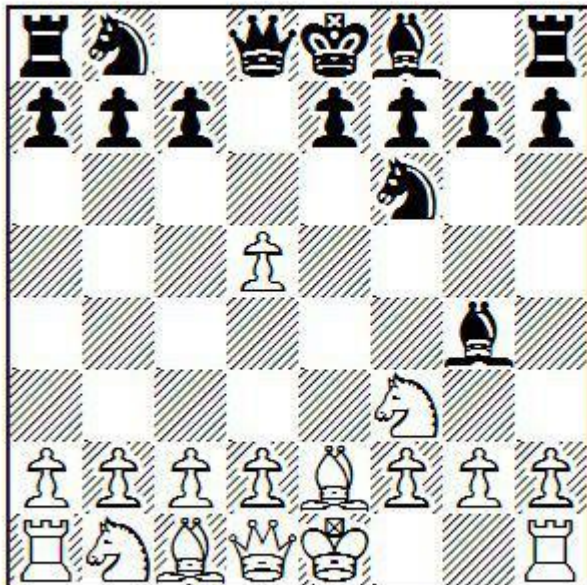
8 ... g6!? 9 Bc4+ Kg7 10 0-0 Bxc5 also gives Black excellent compensation.

9 Qe3 Qxc5 10 Qb3+ Ke7!



Black has sufficient compensation and dangerous attacking potential for the pawn. Ironically, her king on e7 is much safer than his counterpart on e1, while White still has ... Re8 and ... Ne4 ideas to worry about.

B: 4 Be2 – The Celeriac



4 ... Qxd5

Now 5 d4 Nc6 leads back to the Classical (line D), quite a common transposition in practice. White has two independent alternatives that merit consideration:

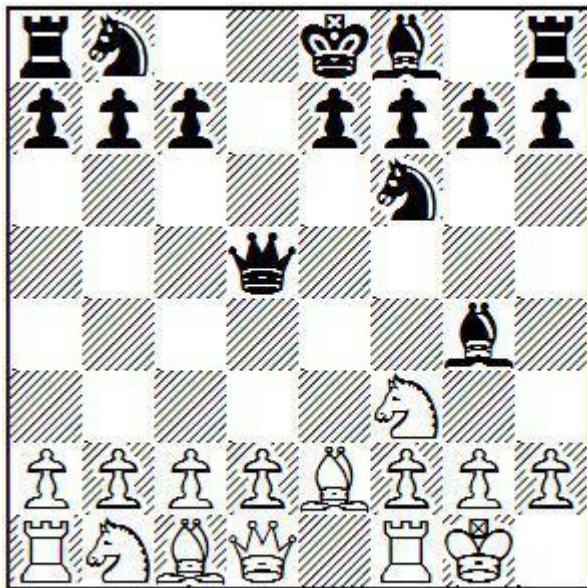
B1: 5 0-0

B2: 5 Nc3

Instead, 5 h3?! is inaccurate here on account of 5 ... Bxf3 6 Bxf3 Qe5+!, which leads to a typical ending where White's bishop pairs count for little. The game is equal. A high-level blitz game quickly ended in a draw: 7 Qe2 Qxe2+ 8 Kxe2 c6 9 d4 e6 10 Nd2 Nbd7 11 Rd1 Nb6 12 c3 Be7 13 Ne4 ½-½ V.Zvjaginsev-Vl.Malakhov, Moscow (blitz) 2004.

After 5 Nc3, however, I am suggesting that Black opt for a rare, peculiar line, which looks ugly at first site but is surprisingly healthy under the surface. A little like a knob of celeriac – more on that later.

B1: 5 0-0



5 ... Nc6 6 h3!

A slightly annoying sequence, and one worth remembering because Black's best remedy is not her natural response. Otherwise 6 Nc3 Qf5 transposes to 6 0-0 Nc6 in line B2 below, while 6 d4 again returns to the Classical variation (line D4).

6 ... Bh5

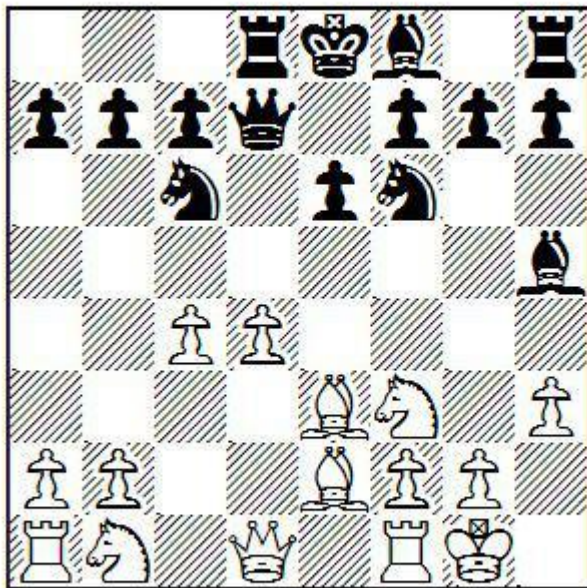
Usually Black handles the kingside kick with ... Bxf3 (or even, on occasion, ... Bxh3), but here it is probably best to retreat the bishop.

The consistent 6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Qf5?! 8 d4 (after 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 d4 e6 10 Nd2 Bd6 11 c3 g5!, Black had a quick and powerful attack in *archimed* (2229)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013) 8 ... e6 allows White to exploit her omission of Nc3 via, for instance, 9 c3! with Qb3 to follow. White is clearly better. On the other hand, 7 ... Qd7! seems to be very playable and might serve those wishing to avoid the theory that follows. For example, 8 Nc3 0-0-0 9 d3 Rg8!? and Black's attack had a head start in S.Berry-N.Povah, British League 2001.

7 d4 e6 8 c4

8 Nc3?! Qd7 makes it difficult for White to gain control over the centre, while the weak d-pawn is a constant source of irritation.

8 ... Qd7 9 Be3 Rd8!



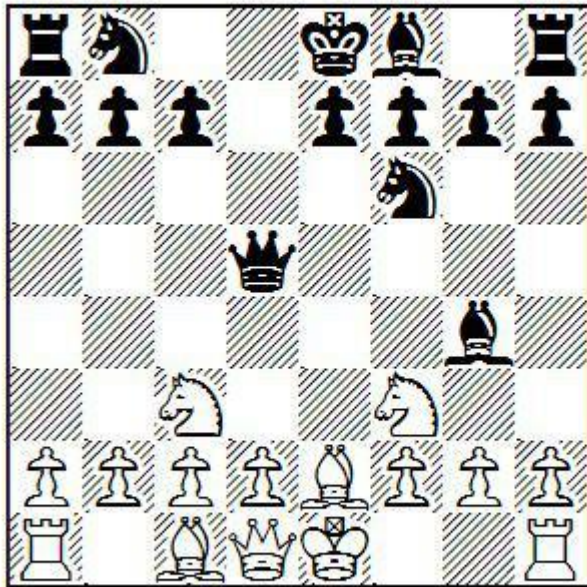
This is an instructive position for this variation. In a sense, White has achieved everything she could want from her opening, as Black

has been forced into retreating with ... Bh5 and ... Qd7, which somewhat deprives her of the usual kingside counterplay. Nonetheless, Black's position is still very solid, and White is obliged to worry constantly about the d4-pawn. Black's c6-knight is unusually placed for this sort of pawn structure, particularly because she no longer can realistically break out with ... e6-e5 or ... c7-c5; instead, a plan of pressuring the centre and restraining White's potential advances is in order.

In summary, White is slightly better, but with a little patience Black should be able to equalize in short time. Objectively, a hypothetical match between two deities will most likely end in a draw. With all of the pieces still on the board, there is plenty of play left in the position for two human adversaries, and any result is possible!

Play might continue 10 Nbd2! (after 10 Nc3 Be7, because of the weak pawn on d4 White is practically forced to initiate exchanges by 11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 dxe5, and now 12 ... Qc6 13 Qc2 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 Nd7 is equal) 10 ... Be7 11 a3 a5 12 Qe1 and here, in Ma.Lyell-K.O'Driscoll, Gallipoli 2014, Black came up with the handy manoeuvre 12 ... Qc8! 13 Nb3 Qa8! and, after 14 g4?! Bg6 15 Ne5, could have already achieved an advantage with 15 ... a4! 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Nc5 Nd7!. The black pieces are far more actively placed than their counterparts, while the doubled c-pawns control key squares and allow Black to make use of two handy semi-open files.

B2: 5 Nc3



White's most consistent and testing continuation.

5 ... Qf5!

Only the fourth (!) most popular move in this position, but I am convinced it is the best.

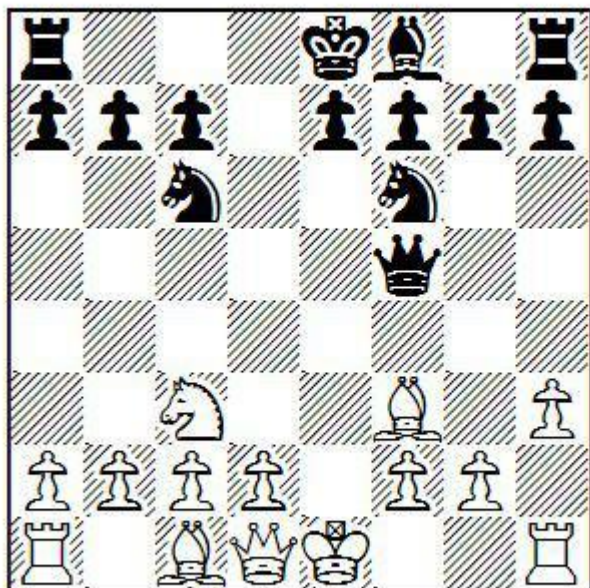
Of course, ... Qh5 is the most desirable move, but White's accelerated development means that typical black sacrifices on the kingside are now too slow. After 5 ... Qh5?! 6 0-0 Nc6 7 h3!, White is clearly better because both 7 ... 0-0-0? and 7 ... Bxh3? just lose for Black, as we saw via 3 ... Qxd5 4 Nc3 Qh5?! at the very beginning of this section.

6 h3

Here 6 0-0 Nc6 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Bxf3 transposes to 8 0-0 in the main line, but if Black is in a gambling mood, she can roll the dice with 7 ... Bh5?! 8 g4 Bxg4 9 hxg4 Qxg4+ 10 Kh1 Qh3+ 11 Nh2 (or 11 Kg1 e6! with compensation for Black, who can of course take a draw by perpetual check whenever she wants) 11 ... h5! 12 Rg1 0-0-0 with some compensation (and two pawns) for the piece. It's not enough, objectively speaking, but White will certainly face some anxious moments on the kingside in over-the-board play, particularly at faster time controls.

6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Nc6!

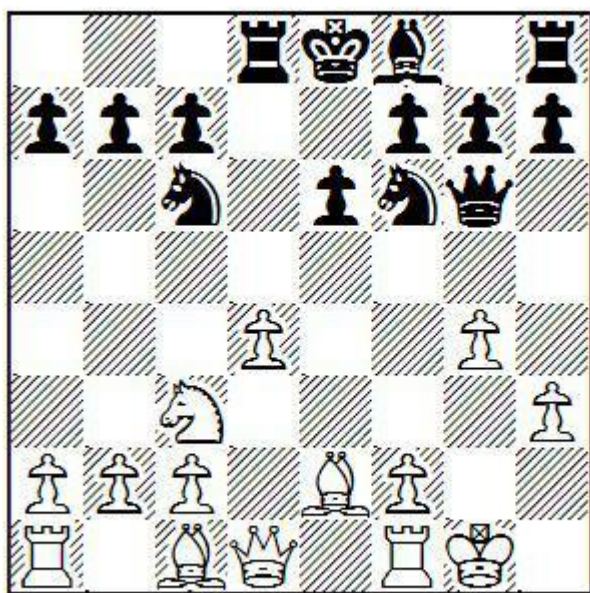
When I first showed my idea to my long-time friend and Australian Olympiad captain, Manuel Weeks, he exclaimed: “What an ugly move!” I expect many people would feel similarly on seeing this for the first time. However, in a sense this is a very logical continuation. White has achieved the bishop pair, but Black has a lead in development and attacking ambitions on the kingside. Consequently, Black is happy to offer a weakening of her pawn structure in exchange for removing one of White’s key kingside defenders, as well as eliminating one of her bishops. Furthermore, after such an exchange, Black will have a useful post for her knight on d5, from where an exchange of knights would correct Black’s structure anyway. Finally, perhaps the most surprising advantage of the doubled black pawns on the c-file is that they will offer the black king some valuable protection in his new home on – wait for it – d7!



This line could actually occur quite often in practice through various move-orders, and given that Black’s opening concept is so original, I felt that it deserved its own name. When Manuel’s wife serendipitously exclaimed “What an ugly vegetable!” upon seeing celeriac for the first time, I had my answer.

8 Bxc6+

White can delay (or omit) the exchange on c6, although she will find it difficult to come up with a productive alternative. For example, 8 0-0 e6 9 d4 (similarly, 9 d3 Bd6! is fine for Black, who can consider castling in either direction or even not at all, while 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 just transposes to the main line) 9 ... Rd8! with a healthy position. If White develops naturally with 10 Be3, Black can continue 10 ... Be7 and ... 0-0, with ideas of ... Nd5 or playing for ... e6-e5. White's only real alternative is to try to exploit the position of Black's queen, but this runs into a sacrificial refutation: 10 g4 Qg6 11 Be2?!



and now 11 ... Nxg4! 12 hxg4 Rxd4 13 Bd2 h5! 14 g5 Qf5! with a strong attack.

8 ... bxc6

Although this position is rare in tournament play, I've faced it often in blitz and rapid.

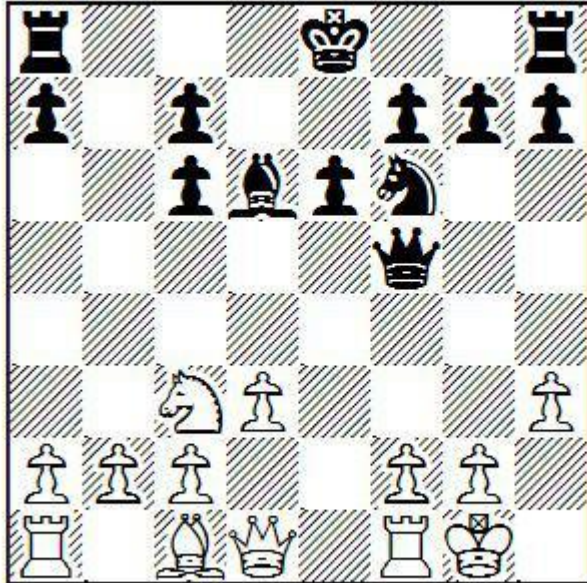
9 d3

White's most common response. 9 Qe2 leads us to Game 20 (Maslak-Smerdon). Having created the theory on this variation myself, I was surprised to discover that this position had actually been reached before my own analysis, in a girls under-14 game at a World Youth Festival at which I was also participating! Let's have a look.

9 ... e6 10 0-0

Black's position is already very comfortable and she has several reasonable options at this point, such as simple development with ... Bc5, ... Be7, or ... Rb8. My preference, however, is for the more aggressive deployment.

10 ... Bd6!



I have played this position several times in blitz, with a 100% record; Black's attack almost plays itself. She plans a quick sprint with her g-pawn to lever open the white kingside, supported by ... Rhg8. Her queen's rook is comfortably placed on b8, where it holds up the white queenside and can also swing into the game via b4 on occasion.

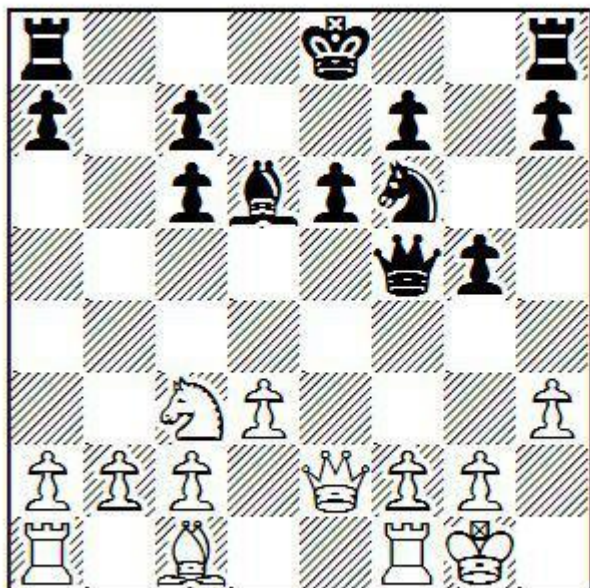
Black's doubled c-pawns may look ugly to some, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and personally I find them beautiful! They are hardly a weakness in this middlegame; in fact the cheeky little guys serve a very useful defensive role in front of Black's king, which most often finds himself on the surprisingly secure d7-square. On the other hand, kingside castling is absolutely an acceptable, if less bloodthirsty, option. All in all, I believe Black has excellent chances here.

The stem game saw the premature 10 ... g5? 11 Ne2 g4 12 hxg4?! (12 Ng3! is good for White) 12 ... Qxg4 13 Nf4, Se.Keskin-J.Codina Tormo, World Junior Championships, Oropesa del Mar 2000, and now 13 ... h5! would have been more than fine for Black.

11 Qe2

11 Re1 should correctly be met by 11 ... Rb8, ... 0-0 and ... Rfd8, with equal chances. Instead, 11 ... g5!? is somewhat riskier, though I would happily repeat it at longer time controls. Black essentially commits her king to the centre, but her audacious attack should not be underestimated. For example, 12 Ne4 (the computer's suggestion of 12 g4!? gives Black excellent chances after 12 ... Qg6 13 Qf3 Kd7!, with ... h7-h5 to follow) 12 ... Nxe4! (12 ... Rg8 13 Nxf6+ Qxf6 14 Re4 Kd7! was also acceptable for Black in *Dominator* (2511)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012) 13 Rxe4 h5 and ... g5-g4, launching a dangerous pawn storm.

11 ... g5!?

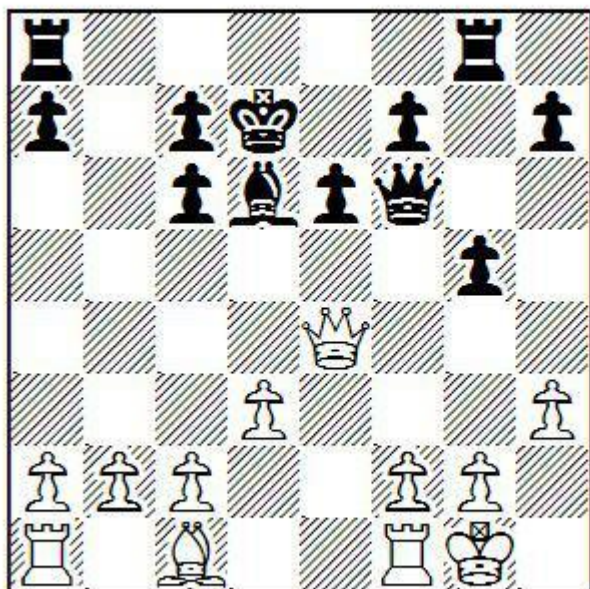


Again, simple development by ... Rb8, ... 0-0, and ideas of ... Nd5 was solid, with balanced chances. However, it is hard to resist the bold g-pawn thrust.

12 Ne4 Rg8 13 Nxf6+

13 g4!? (such a computer move!) can be met by the consistent 13 ... Qg6! 14 Re1 (taking the g-pawn is very dangerous for White after 14 Nxg5 h5 15 f3 0-0-0!, while 14 Bxg5? loses a piece to 14 ... Nxe4) 14 ... h5! 15 gxh5 Qf5 with excellent attacking chances.

13 ... Qxf6 14 Qe4 Kd7!



Not even the most dedicated devotee of the classical school of chess could argue that Black's king is endangered! In every game I have had from this position, White has struggled to solve the looming problems on the kingside:

15 c3

15 f4? is a principled attempt to open up the position against Black's centralized king, but its intentions badly backfire: 15 ... g4! 16 f5 gxh3 17 fxe6+ Qxe6 and White resigned in *valjad* (2220)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

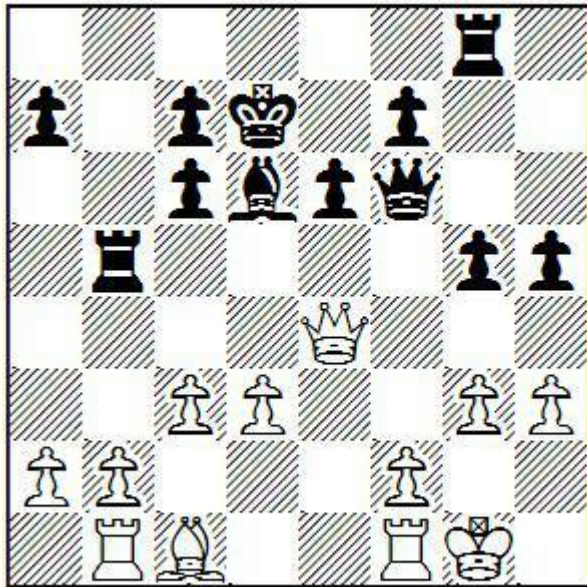
15 ... h5?!

15 ... g4! is much better, as 16 hxg4 Qh4 17 g3 Rxg4! wins.

16 g3

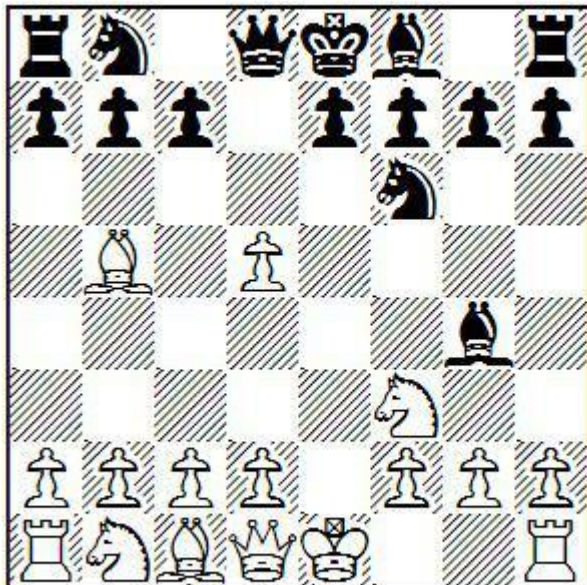
Again 16 f4 g4! is crushing: 17 hxg4 Rxg4 18 Be3 Rag8 19 Rf2 h4 20 Bd4 Qh6 21 Re1 h3 22 Ree2 Bxf4 23 Qf3 hxg2 24 Rxg2 Bh2+ 25 Kf1 Rf4 0-1 *BillyCorgan* (2450)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2012.

16 ... Rab8 17 Rb1 Rb5!



The final black piece swings into the attack. Another game *BillyCorgan* (2400)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013, continued 18 d4 Rf5 19 Be3, when 19 ... g4! 20 h4 Qg6!, threatening both ... Rxf2 and ... Bxg3, gives Black a clear advantage.

C: 4 Bb5+! – Charlie's Choice

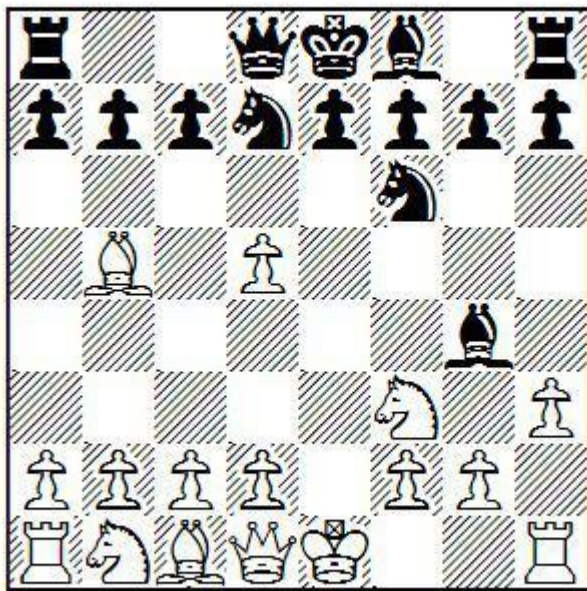


4 ... Nbd7

As a general rule, 4 ... c6? is weaker when White hasn't committed to d2-d4. For example, 5 dxc6 Nxc6 6 h3! Bh5 7 d3! e6 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 Nbd2 with a clear advantage, M.Gockner-H.Penker, correspondence 2012.

5 h3!

5 c4 is markedly inferior: 5 ... e6! 6 dxe6 Bxe6 (6 ... fxe6 is also quite acceptable for Black; for example, 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Qxf3 c6 9 Ba4 Ne5! and here White must play 10 Qe3, when Black's compensation is obvious; instead, 10 Qe2? Nd3+ 11 Kd1 Bc5! led to Black collecting a big scalp in G.Guseinov-R.Damaso, Dos Hermanas, Internet blitz 2004) 7 d3 c6 8 Ba4 Bd6 with excellent compensation for the pawn.



I have a friend called Charlie. Charlie is a simple creature who prefers his openings like he prefers his food: simple, solid and safe, while requiring little preparation. When he asked me for the best no-nonsense approach against my own opening, I didn't hesitate in recommending 5 h3. Charlie was happy.

This innocent-looking move is in fact a serious attempt at a refutation. This is an inconvenient moment for Black to have to decide what to do with her bishop on g4. In general, as you should

know by now, Black primarily answers h2-h3 with ... Bxf3, followed immediately by capturing on d5. However, here White can take advantage of the omission of d2-d4 to secure the d5-pawn, leaving Black bereft of counterplay. On the other hand, retreating the bishop to h5 will leave Black's queen exposed when she eventually lands on d5, as her usual h5- and f5-squares are no longer realistically available. The consequence of this quandary is that White can aim for positions that are comfortable, simple and relatively safe – a perfect choice for Charlie.

The position after 5 h3 is, from the perspective of our repertoire, quite rare. Nonetheless, I consider it to be one of White's best ways of responding to 3 ... Bg4. Furthermore, it has been recommended by some highly-regarded chess authors, such as GM John Emms, GM Larry Kaufman and IM Andrew Greet, so Black should definitely be prepared to handle this variation. These authors give Black's position a very negative prognosis, but I will argue that things are not as bad as they seem; in fact, equipped with a good understanding of this variation, Black should be able to hold her own, even if the lines aren't as fun as those in other parts of this book.

I consider 5 ... Bh5! to be Black's best option, but it is worth looking at the alternatives to see why Black's position is so fragile after other moves. Also, you may decide that you don't like the slightly more passive nature of the positions after 5 ... Bh5 and would prefer to roll the dice with a riskier variation. Consequently, we will also take a closer look at 5 ... a6!?. While being objectively inferior, this move does offer more active possibilities and forces White to play accurately in order to secure an advantage.

C1: 5 ... a6!?

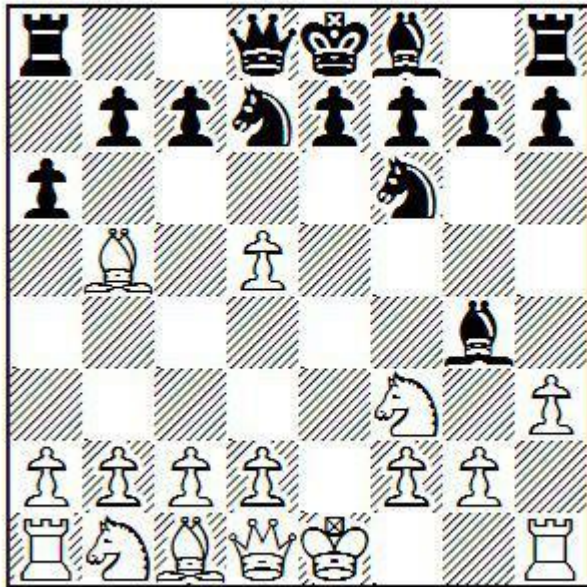
C2: 5 ... Bh5!

Other moves are simply weak:

a) 5 ... Bxf3? 6 Qxf3 a6 7 Ba4! b5 8 Bb3 is winning, as Black is critically weak on the light squares, H.Van Riemsdijk-Ca.Martins, Petropolis 1996.

b) 5 ... Bf5? 6 Nc3! a6 7 Ba4 b5 8 Nd4!! is completely crushing, F.Hernandez Gallardo-J.Herms Agullo, Palma de Mallorca 2009.

C1: 5 ... a6!?



Tricky. Black delays her plans with regard to the bishop on g4 until White clarifies those of her own bishop.

6 Ba4!

White has several options, but this retreat is 'the problem' with 5 ... a6. Instead:

a) 6 Be2 allows a favourable exchange: 6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Ne5! 8 Nc3 Qd7 9 d4 Nxf3+ 10 Qxf3 was M.Santo Roman-Pa.Dias, Loures 1997, and now 10 ... Rd8! 11 0-0 Nxd5 12 Ne4 Qc6! (preventing c2-c4). Black is only a few moves away from completing development, which will most likely involve a kingside fianchetto.

b) 6 Bxd7+ Bxd7 7 c4 gives Black a pleasant choice between either an endgame or a middlegame: 7 ... b5 (or 7 ... e6 8 Qe2 Qe7 9 dxe6 Qxe6 10 d4 Qxe2+ 11 Kxe2 0-0-0 with sufficient compensation for the pawn) 8 d3 c6 9 dxc6 Bxc6 10 0-0 e6 with good play due to the bishop pair and the semi-open d-file.

c) 6 hxg4 axb5 leaves White with weak pawns on g4 and d5. She can keep her extra pawn only at the cost of a premature queen excursion: 7 Qe2 Nxd5 8 Qxb5 e6! and White's permanently weak king, coupled with her undeveloped queenside, grants Black

dangerous attacking chances for the small material investment. For example, 9 Qxb7 Nb4! 10 Kd1 c6! forces White to walk a tightrope to survive: 11 a3 Rb8 12 Qa7 Nxc2!! 13 Kxc2 Nc5! 14 Rh5! (the only move) 14 ... f5!? (14 ... Qd3+ is a draw by perpetual check) 15 d4 Rb7 16 Bg5 Qc8 17 Qxb7 Nxb7 18 gxf5 Nd6 reaches an extremely complicated position with chances for both sides, and one in which I would prefer to be Black.

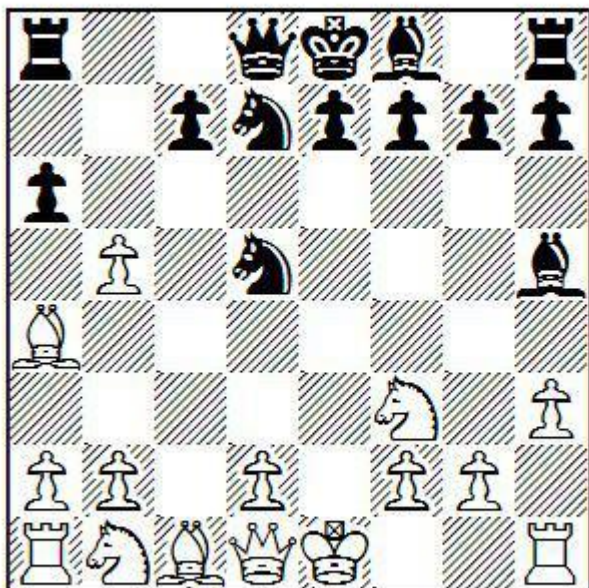
6 ... Bh5

There is nothing better.

7 c4 b5

We have transposed to 5 ... Bh5 6 c4 a6!? 7 Ba4 b5 from the notes to Game 21 (Emms-Smerdon), in which Black preferred 6 ... e6!. Here 7 ... e6? 8 dxe6 fxe6 would be a clearly superior version for White, as Black can no longer gain a tempo with the ... c7-c6 advance.

8 cxb5 Nxd5

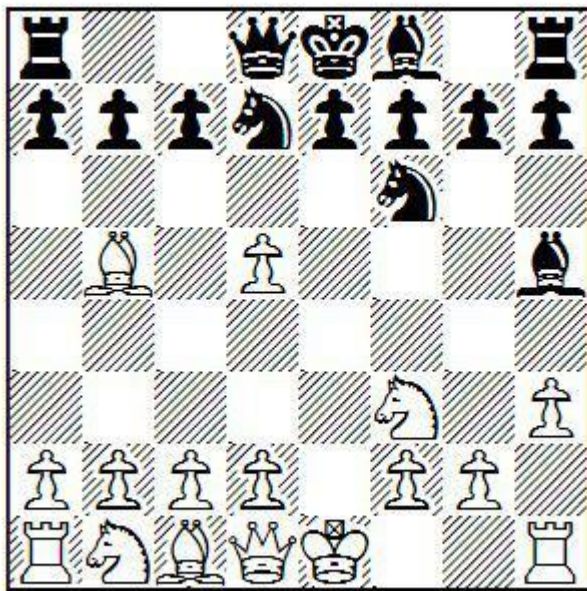


To be sure, Black has a certain amount of compensation for the pawn. However, as compared with more common variations involving a ... b7-b5 sacrifice, White has almost completed her development and doesn't have much to fear from Black's light-squared bishop on h5 (as opposed to b7). All the same, Black has

decent practical chances, so it's worth considering as a surprise weapon or for faster time controls.

The game A.Pecori-D.Smerdon, Melbourne 2004, continued 9 d4 (as we saw in the notes to Emms-Smerdon, 9 0-0! is better here) 9 ... e6 10 g4 Bg6 11 Nc3 Bb4 12 Bd2 N5b6! 13 Bc2 Bxc3 14 Bxc3 axb5 15 Ne5?! Nd5 16 Bd3?? Nxe5! and White resigned as the bishop on d3 is lost.

C2: 5 ... Bh5!



This position hasn't been reached very often in tournament practice; in fact, statistically you are likely to face it only once in thirty or so games with our Scandinavian repertoire. Nevertheless, we will spend a seemingly disproportionate amount of time analysing White's options, as the lines themselves are critical to the soundness of Black's set-up.

6 Nc3!

Certainly the best choice from a practical perspective, and perhaps objectively so as well.

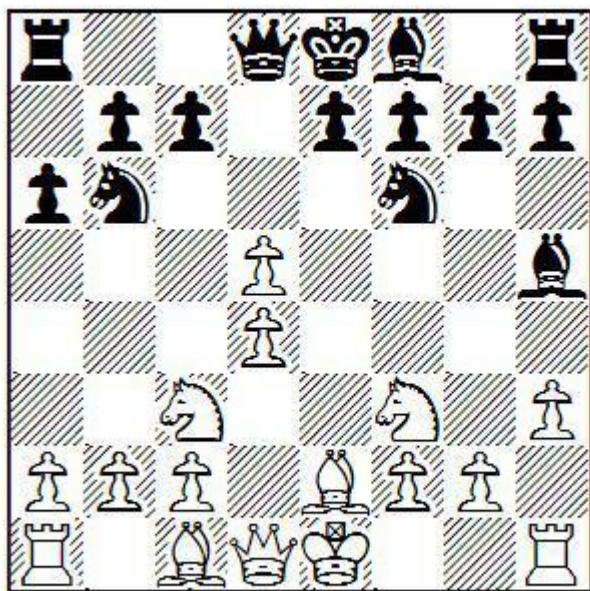
Alternatively, 6 c4 is naturally critical, but after 6 ... e6!, Black quickly drums up a surprising amount of pressure on White's

kingside, and particularly against the pinned knight on f3. See Game 21 (Emms-Smerdon).

6 ... a6 7 Be2!

Here 7 Ba4?! b5 8 Bb3 Nc5! gives Black nothing to worry about.

7 ... Nb6 8 d4



White plays in a very pragmatic fashion, forcing Black to regain her pawn under the most unfavourable circumstances so that White can then gain space in the centre against the black pieces. She plans to exchange her knight for one on d5, and follow with c2-c4, 0-0 and easy, clean development. If Black isn't careful, White will soon have a pleasant advantage against which Black will struggle to find any counterplay. It is little wonder that this line has been the recommendation of many authors as to how White should play against our system.

8 ... Nfxd5!

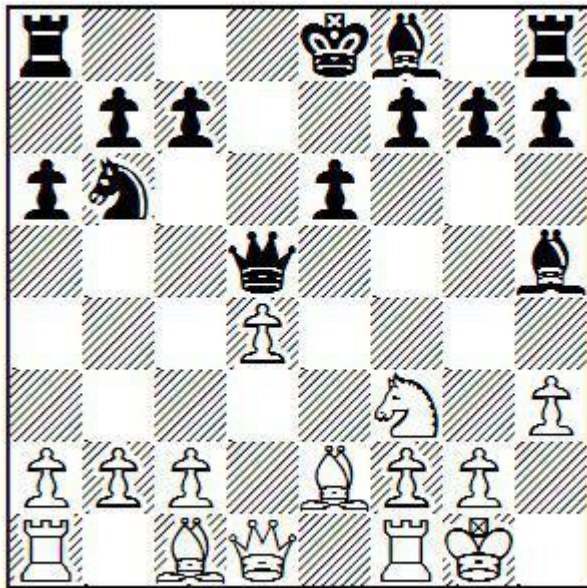
Black has three ways to capture on d5: with both knights, or with either knight followed by her queen. A careful study of this position reveals that the text is the superior choice, as it slows up White's c2-c4 expansion by a critical tempo. 8 ... Nbx d5 9 Nxd5 Qxd5 10 c4 Qd6 11 0-0 is comfortably better for White, D.Khayrullin-N.Klepikov, Izhevsk 2013.

9 Nxd5 Qxd5

After 9 ... Nxd5 10 c4 Nf6 11 Qb3!, White is again clearly better, E.Bonnet-G.Henry, Pau 2000.

10 0-0 e6

Here 10 ... 0-0-0? is tempting; unfortunately, White's lead in development ensures that her attack on the queenside far outpaces Black's efforts on the kingside: 11 Be3 f6 12 b3 e6 13 c4 Qd7 14 a4 and White's attack will crash through.



The diagrammed position has only been seen a handful of times in tournament practice. So why should we spend time on it? Because, as we have seen, Black has no satisfying way to deviate from the variation leading from 3 Nf3 Bg4 to this important position. Furthermore, it is the one issue that leads me to conclude that 3 Nf3 Bg4 is somewhat inferior for Black as compared with 3 d4 Bg4. In particular, while I believe Black's position is sound, it is difficult for her to drum up winning chances if White just holds the fort, something that is very much not the case in many of the other variations we have analysed. I suspect we may see an increase in popularity for this line in the future.

I have painted a fairly negative picture, but I promise it's not all bad news! Previous analysts have evaluated this position as being

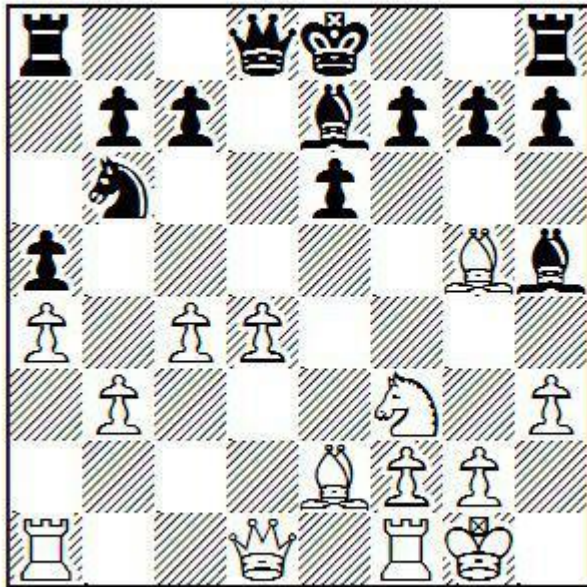
either slightly or clearly better for White, and certainly I must concede that White's position is optically more pleasant. She has more space, a slight lead in development, and will soon put pressure on the centre. However, after looking deeper, it gradually becomes clear that Black's game is exceptionally solid and, after completing her development, she will be well prepared to meet White's advances.

After many hours studying this position, my conclusion is that it is objectively equal. In a match between two supreme error-free deities, the game will end in a draw. I have tested my hypothesis in many, many lengthy training games between the world's top computer engines, and indeed, our esteemed silicon friends always end up splitting the point.

Of course, it is important to remember that White has the 'easier' game. But of equally important note is that our opponents are highly unlikely to have encountered this position before in their entire chess careers, whereas we will be well prepared as Black to handle the resulting play. Personally, my record of one win and one draw (in which I missed several wins!) has given me the confidence to back up the analysis that follows, and I hope you will soon share this view.

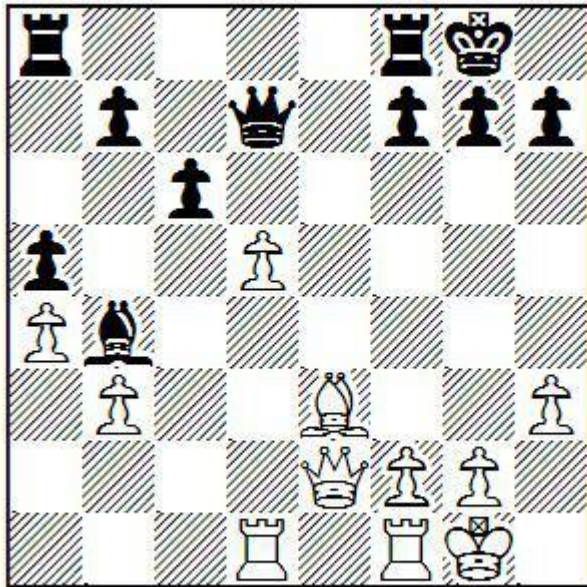
11 b3

The only other continuation seen to date is 11 a4!? a5 12 b3 Bb4 13 c4 Qd8 14 Bg5 Be7.



Black's position is passive and she has yet to fully equalize in the traditional sense of the word. Nevertheless, with accurate play and an understanding of a few general themes of this structure, Black can be confident that no danger will befall her. Moreover, White's queenside pawns can become weak in the long term, and with only one set of minor pieces exchanged, there remains plenty of play left in the game.

This position has only been reached once before (see Game 22, Adair-Smerdon), so there is little practical use in memorizing what follows unless this line suddenly becomes hugely popular. However, should this happen, you may wish to refer back to the analysis below to get yourself acquainted with the nuances. The main line runs as follows: 15 Be3 Nd7!? 16 Ne5 (16 d5 e5 only improves Black's structure, who has gained sizeable control over the centre and queenside dark squares) 16 ... Bxe2 17 Qxe2 c6! 18 Nxd7! Qxd7 19 Rad1 0-0 20 d5 and now 20 ... exd5 (I played 20 ... cxd5 in the game) 21 cxd5 Bb4! is best, and is the choice of all top engines after extremely deep analysis.



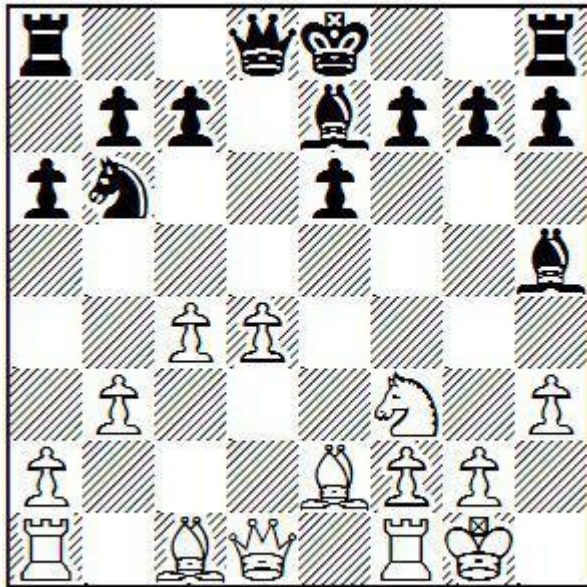
Black is still passive, but at least her bishop has finally found a safe post.

After running many engine-simulated shootouts, I have concluded that the game should end in a draw. Some sample variations: 22 Rd3 (22 Qf3 Rad8 23 Bb6 Rc8 is equal) 22 ... Rae8! 23 Rfd1 Re7! 24 Qf3 (or 24 dxc6 Qxc6 25 Qh5 Rfe8 26 Qd5 Qc2 27 Qb5 h6 28 g3 Qe2 with equality, *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, 31 Ply Shootout 2015) 24 ... Rfe8 25 dxc6 Qxc6 26 Qxc6 bxc6 27 Rc1 c5 28 Rc4 Rc7 29 Rd5 Rec8 30 Bf4 Ra7 31 Bd2 Ba3 32 Be3 Rac7 and White cannot make any progress. *Houdini 4 Pro x64-Houdini 4 Pro x64*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.

11 ... Be7

Castling long is still a bad idea: 11 ... 0-0-0? 12 c4 Qf5 13 Be3 Bb4 and now White can improve on D.Dempster-S.Khan, correspondence 2008, with 14 a3!, since she has nothing to fear from 14 ... Bc3? 15 Rc1! Bb2 16 Rb1 Bxa3 17 b4! and wins.

12 c4 Qd8!



An important moment. The queen's retreat may seem passive, but it is critical to understand that White cannot achieve anything without eventually playing Ne5. Therefore, the queen would be vulnerable on d7, while other squares are clearly inferior. Furthermore, Black will now be able to challenge a white knight on e5 with a subsequent ... Nd7. White's best chances then lie in recapturing on e5 with the d-pawn and immediately applying pressure on the open d-file. With some careful manoeuvring on her own first rank, Black can neutralize White's slight initiative and force major exchanges on the file, after which equality is inevitable. White can instead try to keep things more closed, but then Black can finish her development in peace. Common plans often involve playing ... Nd7 anyway, followed by ideas such as ... Bf6, ... Rfd8, and ... Qe7. Alternatively, she can set up with ... c7-c6, ... Qc7 and ... Rfd8. Usually the king's rook should go to the d-file. Black can delay the development of the other one, as the queen's rook is often useful for supporting the a-pawn. In fact, Black should always be on the lookout for ways to challenge White's queenside structure via ... a6-a5, with ideas of ... a5-a4 or to control the b4-square and threaten ... Bb4. Black can often shake up the queenside via ... b7-b5 as well.

This all sounds a bit vague at the moment, so let's look at some sample lines. I should again stress that this position has seen virtually no practical tests, so you may wish to play over Game 22 (Adair-Smerdon) again if you still feel uncomfortable with this structure. Furthermore, I have included the scores of several deep computer-simulated matches between strong engines that I have run from this position. Going over these games will provide additional understanding and confidence for the handling of Black's position. However, you do not have to memorize the lines that follow. I have included this analysis more for completeness and to supplement your understanding; the actual positions are certainly not as theoretically critical as in other variations.

We will divide up the material in terms of White's choice of how to develop her queen's bishop:

C21: 13 Bb2

C22: 13 Bf4

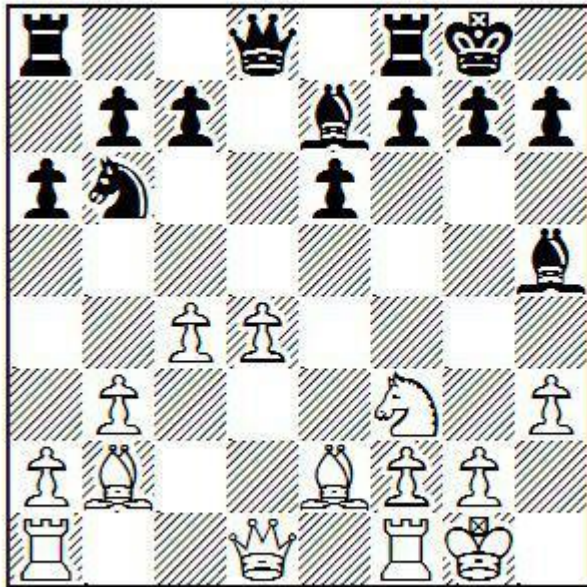
C23: 13 Be3

Instead, 13 Re1 delays the decision but doesn't change the nature of the position. One engine battle continued 13 ... 0-0 14 Bd3 c6 15 Bf4 Nd7 16 g4 Bg6 17 Bxg6 hxg6 18 Qd2 Qb6 19 Qc2 Nf6 20 g5 Nh5 21 Bh2 c5 and Black held with ease in *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, Shootout (33 Ply) 2014.

C21: 13 Bb2

White's option to fianchetto the bishop bolsters the d-pawn but is somewhat less threatening than other developments.

13 ... 0-0



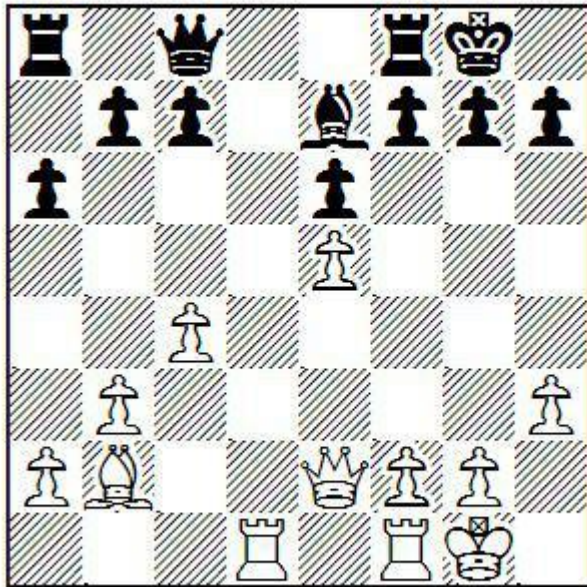
14 Ne5

Alternatively:

a) 14 Qd2 c6 15 Rfe1 a5 shouldn't worry Black; ... a5-a4 is coming, and 16 Ne5 will be met as usual by ... Bxe2 and ... Nd7.

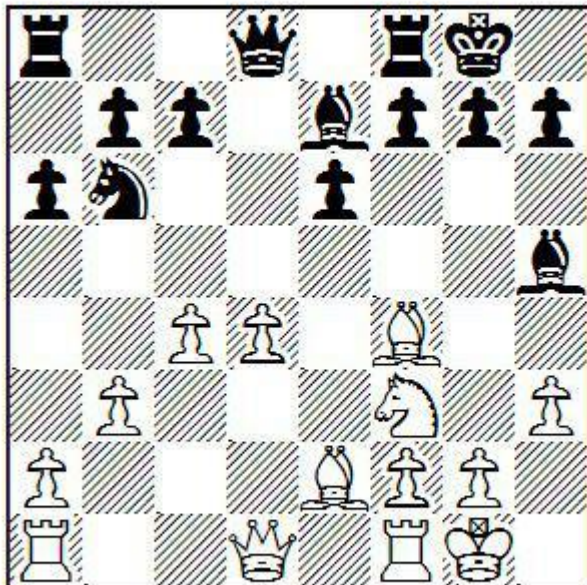
b) 14 g4!? Bg6 15 Ne5 is more ambitious, keeping an extra set of minor pieces on. On the other hand, this leaves White's kingside a little vulnerable, and Black has her fair share of the chances. Personally, I am almost always happy to see g2-g4 on the board in this opening! Play might continue 15 ... c6 16 Qd2 (16 Qc1 Nd7! is balanced) 16 ... a5!? 17 f4 Nd7! (very important!) 18 Nxg6 hxg6, when the position is murky, with chances for both sides. White has more space, but there are potential weaknesses in her camp on both sides of the board, and Black can continue to probe with the typical ideas ... Bb4 or ... a5-a4.

14 ... Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Nd7 16 Rad1 Nxe5 17 dxe5 Qc8!



This allows Black to offset White's space advantage with some accurate shuffling along her own back rank. The following sequence is instructive: 18 Rd3 Rd8 19 Rfd1 Rxd3 20 Qxd3 Qe8! 21 Qd7 Qd8! 22 Kf1 Kf8 with complete equality.

C22: 13 Bf4 0-0



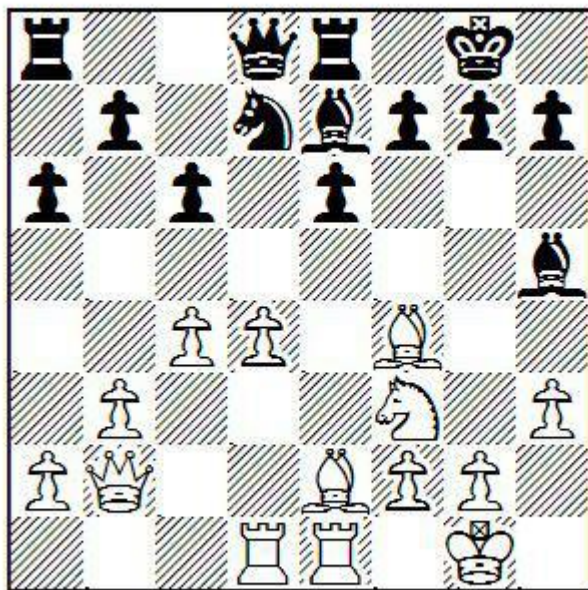
14 Qc2

Other test games saw:

a) 14 Bd3 c6 (14 ... Bd6 15 Bd2 Nd7 16 Qe2 c6 17 Rfe1 Nf6 18 Rad1 Qc7 is extremely solid) 15 g4!? Bg6 16 Bxg6 hxg6 17 Qd2 Re8 18 Kg2 Nd7 19 Rad1 Qb6 20 Qc2 c5!? 21 d5 exd5 22 Rxd5 Nf6 23 Rd3 Rad8 and the ensuing mass exchanges on the d-file lead to equality, *Stockfish 5-Stockfish 5*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.

b) 14 Re1 Nd7 15 a3 Re8 (15 ... a5 seems more natural) 16 b4 Bd6 17 Qc1 h6 18 Bd1 Rf8!? (a mysterious computer move that serves to highlight White's lack of a real plan; Black is doing fine after other natural continuations as well) 19 Bd2 c6 20 a4 Qe7 21 Qb2 Bg6 with an equal, if passive game. The all-engine shootout continued 22 a5 Rfd8 23 Bc2 Bxc2 24 Qxc2 Rac8 25 Bc3 Nf6 26 Qb2 Ne8 27 Rad1 Qf8 28 g3 Be7 29 Ne5 Nd6 30 Qe2 Bf6 31 g4 Re8 32 Kg2 Rcd8 33 Rd3 Bh4 34 Rf3 Bf6 35 Rf1 Qe7 36 Rd3 Qc7 37 f4 Qe7 38 Re3 Qf8 39 Qd3 g6 40 Bb2 Qg7 41 Qb3 Qf8 42 Re2 Qe7 43 Kg1 Bg7 and White can't make progress. *Stockfish 6-Stockfish 6*, Shootout (33 Ply) 2014.

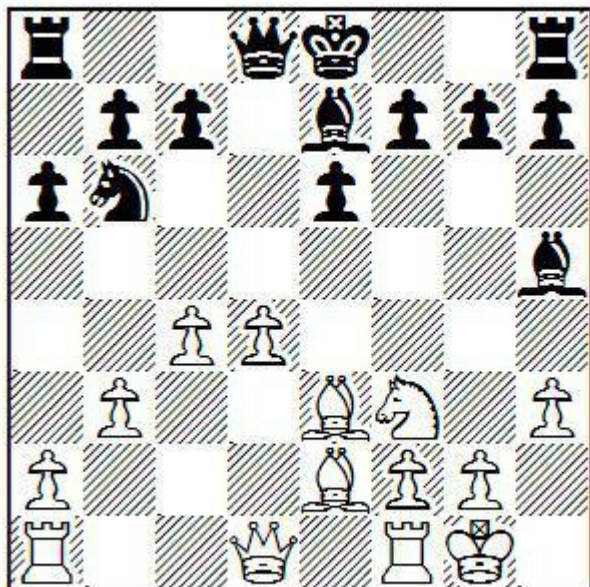
14 ... Nd7 15 Rad1 c6 16 Qb2 Re8 17 Rfe1



Here 17 ... Bb4!? 18 Bd2 a5 would have tempted me. Instead, the engine went for 17 ... Nf8 18 Bh2 Bb4 19 Nd2 Bxe2 20 Rxe2 Bxd2

21 Qxd2 Re7 22 d5 exd5 23 cxd5 cxd5 24 Rxe7 Qxe7 25 Qxd5 Ne6 26 Bd6 Qd7 and the simplifications have sucked the life out of the position once again, *Houdini 4 Pro-Houdini 4 Pro*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.

C23: 13 Be3



This feels like White's most natural continuation.

13 ... 0-0

13 ... c6 14 Ne5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Nd7 also negates White's pressure. For example, 16 Qg4 0-0 17 Bh6 Bf6 18 Rad1 Qe7, when Black will play ... Rfd8 and can think about marching her a-pawn down the board to create some weaknesses in White's queenside.

14 Ne5 Bxe2 15 Qxe2

This was the stem game B.Macieja-A.Gershon, Bermuda 2001. Here, Black would have little to fear after either 15 ... a5, or ...

15 ... Nd7!?

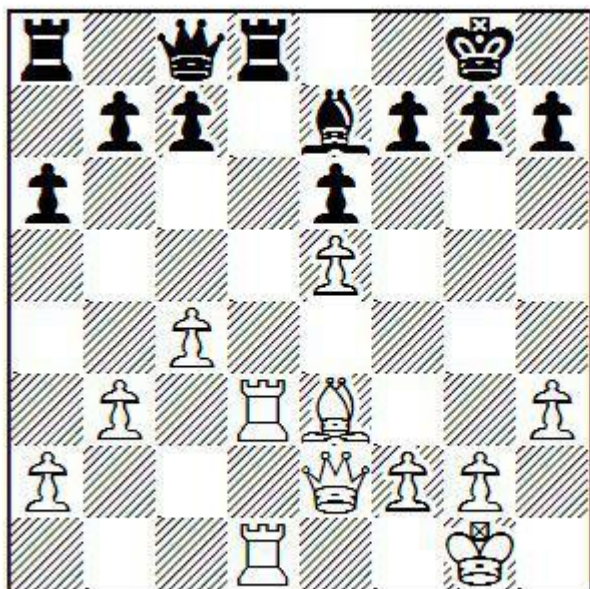
Intending immediate simplifications. I tried this in J.H.Hodgson-D.Smerdon, Daventry (team rapid) 2014. The game continued:

16 Rad1 Nxe5

Or 16 ... c6!? 17 Bf4 Nxe5 18 Bxe5 Qd7 19 c5!? Rad8 20 Rfe1 Rfe8 21 b4 Qd5 22 Qc2 f6 23 Bg3 Rd7 24 Bf4 Bd8 25 a3 g6 26 Bd6

b5 and Black is as solid as a rock. One of my engines quickly found a clever way to liquidate the position: 27 Re2 Kg7 28 Rde1 a5 29 a4 bxa4 30 Qxa4 axb4 31 Qxb4 Ba5! 32 Qxa5 Rxd6 ½-½ *Houdini 4 Pro-Houdini 4 Pro*, Shootout (31 Ply) 2014.

17 dxe5 Qc8 18 Rd3 Rd8 19 Rfd1



White has gained control of the one open file, but the simplifications and lack of entry squares ensure that Black can hold the white forces at bay with minimal discomfort. One little nuance worth remembering is that Black will usually prefer to create some air on the kingside with the paradoxical ... g7-g6, rather than ... h7-h6, as this better prepares her structure for potential endgames.

19 ... Rxd3 20 Rxd3

20 Qxd3 can be met either by 20 ... Rb8 (a useful move in these positions), intending ... Qd8 or ... c7-c5 and ... b7-b5, or the immediate 20 ... Qd8!? with equality, as 21 Qd7 is answered safely by 21 ... Kf8.

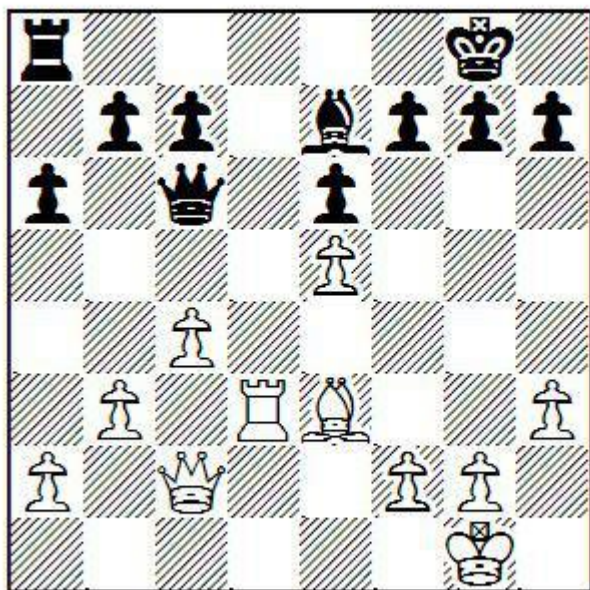
20 ... Qe8?!

Inaccurate. 20 ... Rb8! 21 Qf3 (or 21 Qd2 Qf8 22 Rd7 Rd8) 21 ... c5 (21 ... g6 is also fine) 22 Qd1 b5 23 Rd7 Rb7 is equal.

21 Qc2?!

Here 21 Qf3! would have made Black's life a little uncomfortable, as ... c7-c6 critically weakens the b6-square; i.e. 21 ... c6? 22 Bb6! Bd8 23 Bxd8 Rxd8 24 Rd6 clearly favours White, while 21 ... Qc8 22 Qg4 g6 and now 23 Bg5! Qe8 24 Qh4! Bxg5 25 Qxg5 gives White a pleasant endgame, although a draw is still the most reasonable result after a proper amount of suffering by Black.

21 ... Qc6!?

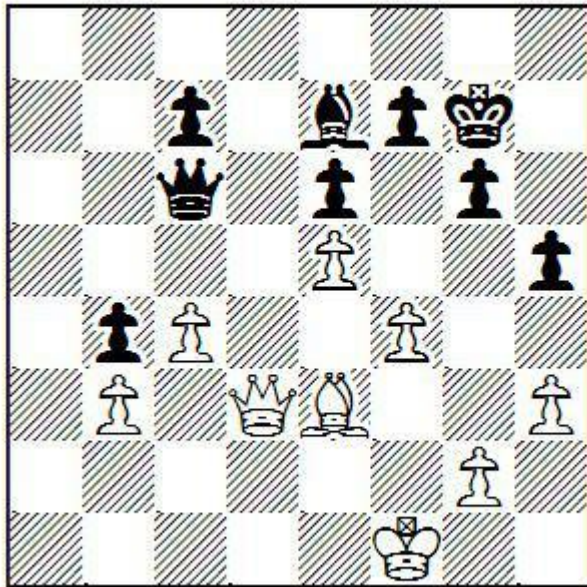


Of course 21 ... Rd8 is immediately equal; I wanted to keep more pieces on the board to retain some winning chances. We have now well and truly left the realm of theoretical relevance, but I will present the rest of this game as instruction on how Black can create some pressure from such a level endgame:

22 Rd2 Bb4 23 Rd1 h6 24 Qd3

24 c5! is better.

24 ... Be7 25 Qc2 b5!? 26 Rc1 b4! 27 Rd1 a5 28 Rd2 a4 29 Qd3 axb3 30 axb3 Rd8 31 Qc2 Rxd2 32 Bxd2 Qd7 33 Be3 Bg5 34 f4 Be7 35 Qd2 Qc6 36 Qd3 h5 37 Kf1 g6 38 Kg1 Kg7 39 Kf1



39 ... Qa8!

White is clearly playing for a draw, but suddenly, with the emergence of a second open file on the board, Black finds a way to infiltrate the white camp.

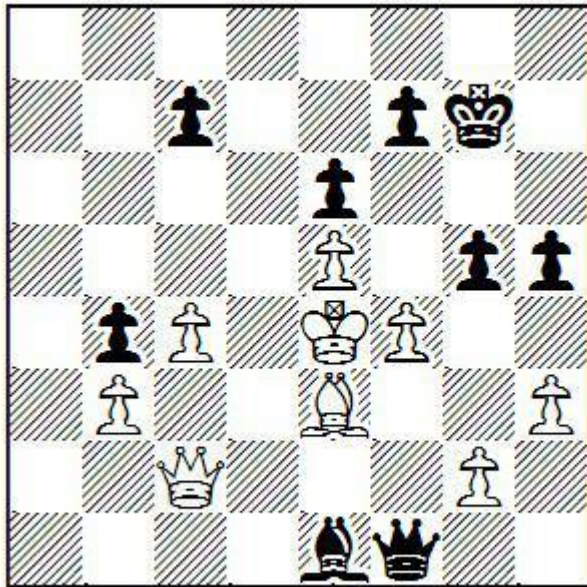
40 Bf2 Qa1+ 41 Ke2 Qb2+ 42 Kf3 Qc1 43 Be3 Qa1 44 Bf2 Qb2

44 ... g5! was stronger.

45 Be3 Bh4 46 Bd4 Qc1 47 Be3?! Qe1! 48 Qd2?

White might yet have defended after 48 Ke4!? or, on the previous move, 47 g3!.

48 ... Qf1+ 49 Ke4 Be1! 50 Qc2 g5!



Black has made significant inroads. The attack cannot be stopped.

51 Qa2 Bc3?!

Correct was 51 ... gxf4 52 Bxf4 Bf2! 53 Kf3 Bg1+ 54 Ke4 Qe1+ 55 Kf3 Qd1+ 56 Kg3 Kg6 with ... Qd3+ to follow, mating.

52 Qc2 g4?

Missing ... g5xf4 for a second time, but the position is not yet spoiled. We were both in critical time trouble at this stage, which somewhat prolonged the game.

53 hxg4 hxg4 54 Qa2 Qd1 55 Bf2 Kg6 56 Be3 Kg7 57 Bf2 Qh1! 58 Be3? Qh7+ 0-1

Section Three – Conclusion

In recent years, 3 Nf3 has been considered something of an easy fix for White to obtain a stable edge without having to worry about the perils of the Portuguese complex. In fact, after 3 Nf3, 3 ... Bg4 is considered dubious by many sources.

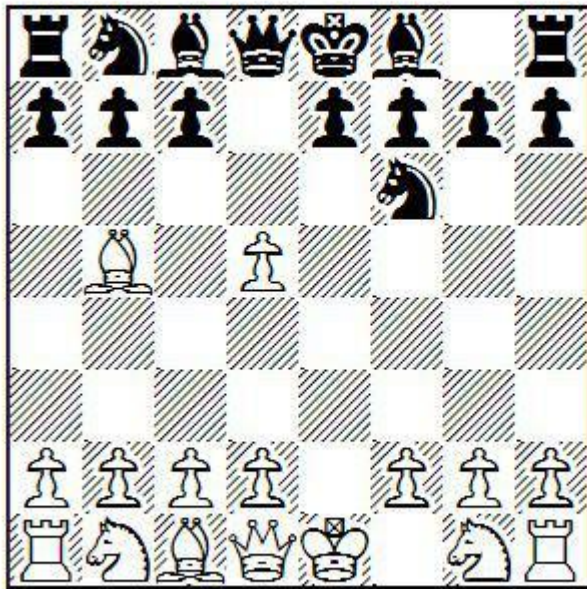
I hope to have convinced you that Black has several interesting (and unexplored) resources in these variations. In particular, the Goulash and the Celeriac lead to positions that are not at all what you would call 'textbook', and we have seen that Black's chances should not be underestimated. Charlie's choice is a more sophisticated recipe and, admittedly, if White really knows her stuff, she can suck some of the spice out of our attacking chances. Nevertheless, theoretically and objectively, Black has excellent chances to hold the balance.

This section is full of new ideas from my home analysis kitchen. Study them well, and you can be guaranteed to find yourself the better prepared to handle the ensuing tactical stew.

Section Four

Check! – 3 Bb5+

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Bb5+



This is equally White's second-most played option (joint with 3 c4), and has been regularly employed by many strong players, but I have never understood its popularity. There is some basic logic to developing the bishop outside of the pawn chain before defending d5 with c2-c4. However, after 3 ... Nbd7, Black will usually be able to exchange off this bishop for her knight in a couple of moves, when her own light-squared bishop can turn into a monster. After the standard undermining procedure of ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5, Black's bishop can find excellent work from either b7 or a6, while White will often be saddled with one or two isolated d-pawns. Black can also opt to break down the pawn centre with ... c7-c6 or ... e7-e6 as the situation dictates; in every scenario, the bishop pair and superior

structure guarantee Black excellent compensation, and often much more than that.

As you can see, I have great faith in Black's chances after 3 ... Nbd7, which is the most natural choice to me, although it isn't actually the main line. Instead, 3 ... Bd7 is more popular, after which White scores quite well with the tame retreat 4 Be2, though even here I have faith that Black's potential can be maximized with the extremely rare gambit 4 ... c6!?. I have done a lot of my own analysis on this line and have found some very interesting new ideas for Black – so much so that I have decided to cover 3 ... Bd7 as well. However, note that my main recommendation for Black remains 3 ... Nbd7, and this move will form the basis for the following illustrative games.

Game 23

S.Movsesian-R.Damaso

European Team Championship, Pula 1997

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Bb5+

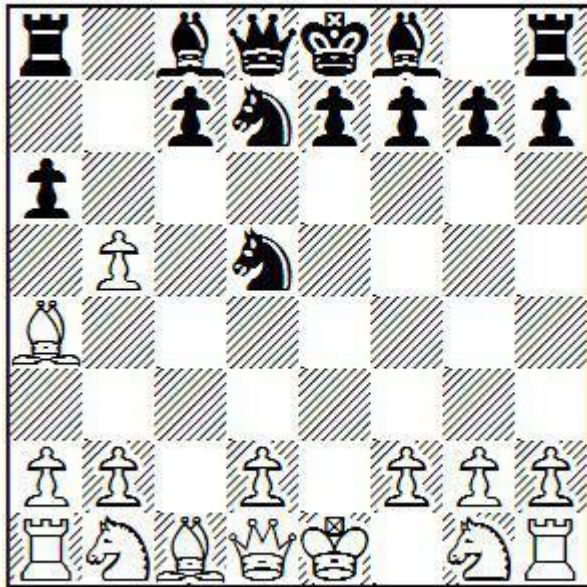
A Movsesian favourite.

3 ... Nbd7

Not as popular as 3 ... Bd7, but I have a certain fondness for this move. Black plans simply ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5, seeking to isolate the extra white d-pawn and, if possible, exchange off White's pesky bishop for a knight, leaving Black's queen's bishop to rule the light squares.

4 c4 a6 5 Bxd7+

5 Ba4 is equally popular, when Black continues with her plan of undermining the centre: 5 ... b5 6 cxb5 Nxd5.



Here, taking on a6 is far too risky, while against other moves Black should continue with ... N5b6! to hassle White's bishop. Black typically will develop by ... e7-e6, ... Bd6 and ... 0-0, with pressure on both sides of the board. For example, 7 Nc3 N5b6 8 Bb3 e6 9 d4 axb5 10 Nxb5 Ba6 11 Nc3 Bd6 with excellent compensation. If 12 Nf3?! 0-0 13 Bc2 then 13 ... e5! gives Black a clear advantage.

5 ... Bxd7

5 ... Qxd7!? is acceptable for Black and is seen in the next game (Li Chao-Smerdon), but the text is more aggressive, aiming for a Jadoul-style position.

6 d4

Both 6 Nf3 and 6 Ne2 should also be met by 6 ... e6, in each case with sufficient compensation for Black. With the two bishops, a lead in development, and strong pressure against White's central pawns, Black should have no complaints about the outcome of the opening.

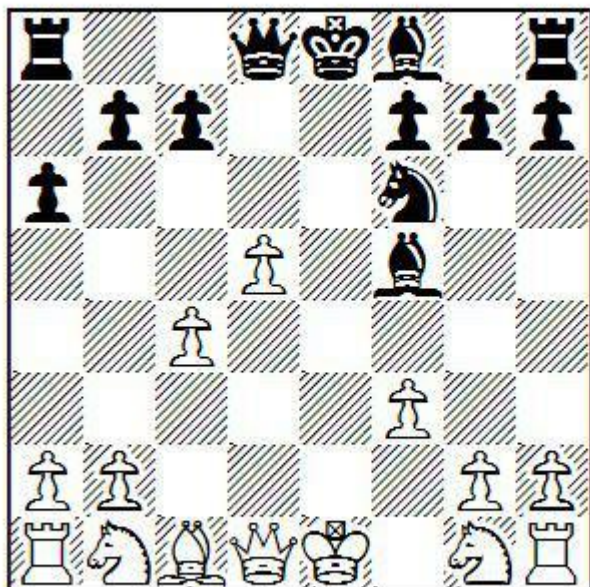
6 ... e6

After 6 ... b5!?, White should jettison the c-pawn and develop one of her knights, because 7 b3 e6! 8 dxe6 Bxe6 9 d5 Bg4! 10 f3?! Bf5 11 Ne2 Bc5! is extremely unpleasant for White, V.Anand-L.Galego, Oviedo (rapid) 1993.

7 dxe6 Bxe6 8 d5 Bg4! 9 f3?!

9 Nf3 is better, when 9 ... Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Qe7+ 11 Qe2 0-0 is a natural sequence. Black retains excellent activity and pressure for the pawn even without queens on the board. For example, 12 Qxe7 Bxe7 13 Nc3 b5! 14 cxb5 Bxf3! 15 gxf3 axb5 16 Nxb5 Rfb8! and Black has a sizeable advantage.

9 ... Bf5

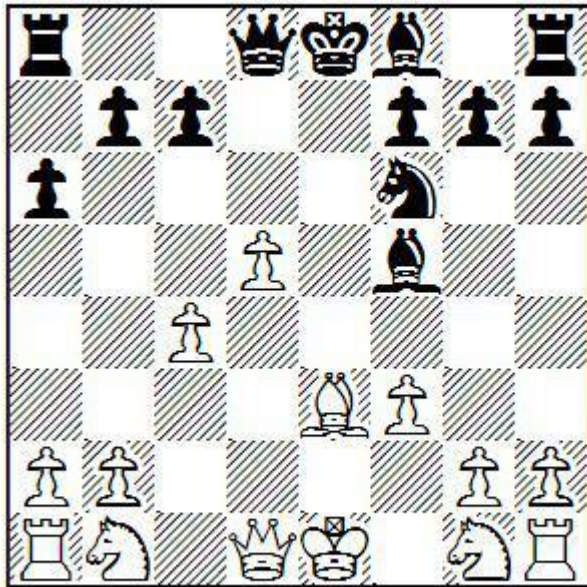


The similarities to the Jadoul and other variations following 3 d4 Bg4 are striking. The key difference is that White has exchanged off her light-squared bishop, which, if anything, makes her light-squared weaknesses even more difficult to defend. Black already has the initiative.

10 Be3

A natural developing move, preventing Black's bishop from controlling the important g1-a7 diagonal. However, White is critically behind in development, and the f8-bishop will soon find another role.

Understandably, Movsesian wasn't impressed by 10 Nc3 Bc5 11 Nge2 0-0, which looks simply horrible for White. For instance, 12 Bg5 b5! leaves White fatally stretched on both sides of the board, while the king is stranded in the centre.

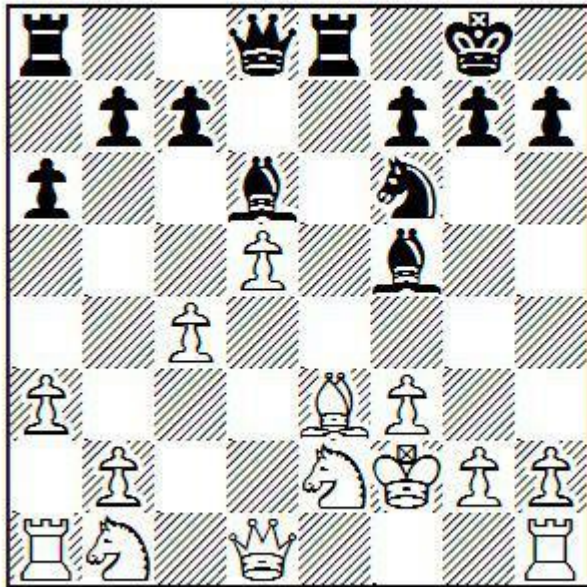


10 ... Bb4+! 11 Kf2

Not 11 Nd2?! Qe7 12 Qe2 0-0 13 a3 Bc5 and White will soon be slaughtered along the e-file. 11 Nc3 was slightly preferable, but again the pressure on White's position after 11 ... 0-0, followed by ... b7-b5, is fast reaching boiling point.

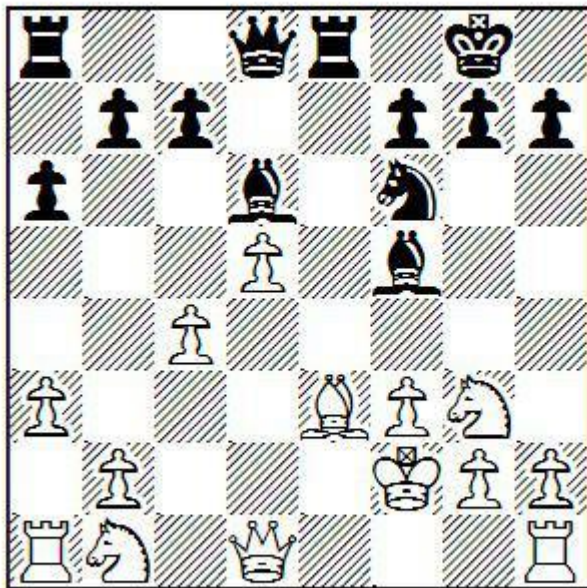
11 ... 0-0 12 a3 Bd6 13 Ne2 Re8

Black is clearly better. The black pieces are excellently placed, ready and eager to enter the attack, whereas the white forces are scattered and vulnerable. All this for the cost of just a pawn – a bargain by any description!



14 Ng3

Soon after this game was played, some commentators suggested 14 Nbc3 as an improvement. Having by now read the chapter on the Banker, you should be able to spot the appropriate remedy: 14 ... Rxe3!! 15 Kxe3 Bc5+ 16 Kd2 Qe7 with a crushing attack.



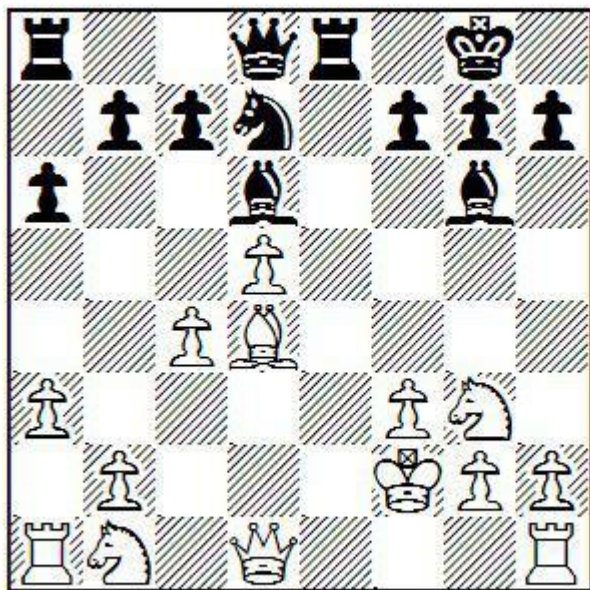
14 ... Bg6

Even without Black's dark-squared bishop, the standard sacrifice on e3 would have proved decisive: 14 ... Bxg3+ 15 hxg3 Rxe3!! 16 Kxe3 Qd6! with a winning attack. Note that 17 Kf2 Qc5+ 18 Kf1 Qe3! and ... Bd3+ wins the white queen.

15 Bd4

White sensibly wants to remove the bishop from the volatile e3-square, but this is another tempo that could have been spent on development, and time is certainly of the essence. Then again, 15 Nc3 Rxe3!! 16 Kxe3 Qe7+ wins for Black, as I'm sure you've come to appreciate by now, and 15 Re1 Nd7! only delays the inevitable invasion.

15 ... Nd7!

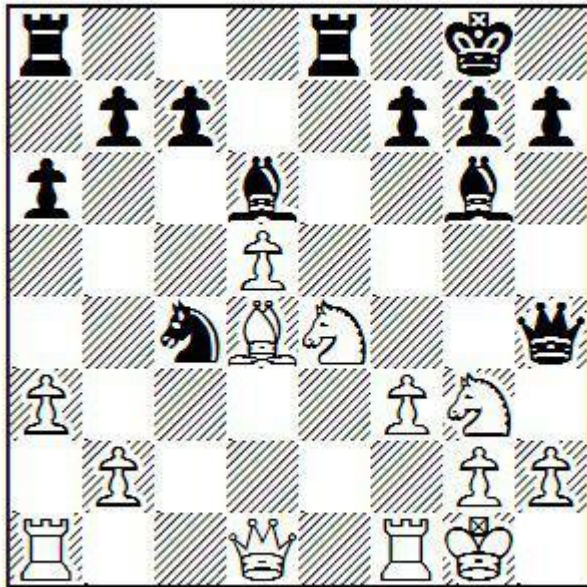


A common motif in the variations of 3 d4 Bg4, clearing the way for the queen to enter the fray and preparing to relocate the knight to e5 or c5. Black's attack is huge.

16 Rf1

16 Nc3 Qh4, followed by ... Nc5, is crushing.

16 ... Ne5 17 Kg1 Qh4! 18 Nc3 Nxc4 19 Nce4



19 ... Bf4

Missing a chance to finish the miniature off nicely: 19 ... Bxe4 20 fxe4 Rxe4!! is conclusive.

20 Re1?

20 Qd3 was more resilient, though naturally Black retains a winning advantage.

20 ... f5! 21 Qd3 Ne5! 22 Bxe5 fxe4! 23 Qc4 Bxe5 24 d6+ Kh8 25 d7 Red8 26 Rad1 Qe7 0-1

An impressive scalp by one of the godfathers of our opening.

Game 24

Li Chao-D.Smerdon

Sydney 2010

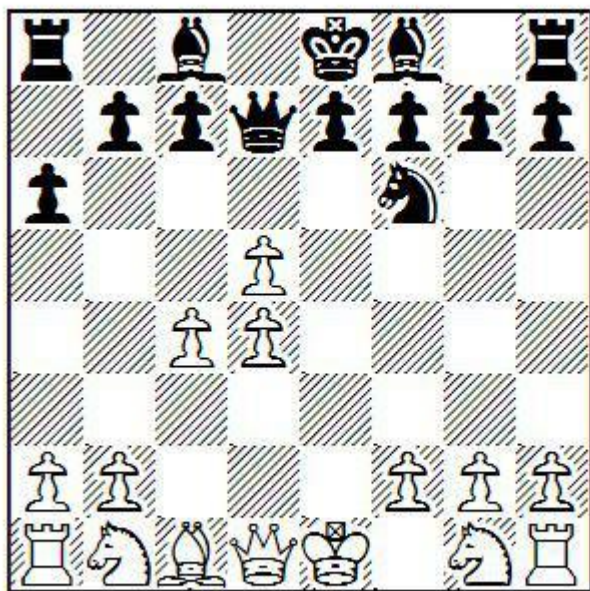
As we have seen several times by now, Black can score some spectacular brilliancies in this opening. Conversely, I used to joke with my chess friends that another great advantage is that, when things go wrong, at least the losses are over quickly. This game is, unfortunately, a good example!

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Bb5+ Nbd7 4 c4 a6 5 Bxd7+ Qxd7

5 ... Bxd7 is my primary recommendation these days, although the text is not bad either.

6 d4

Instead, 6 d3 e6 is acceptable for Black; and 6 Nf3 Qg4! wins the pawn back straight away, G.Canfell-D.Smerdon, Melbourne 2004.



Black has the choice between three standard undermining breaks against the white centre: ... e7-e6, ... c7-c6 and ... b7-b5. In this position, all are playable.

6 ... c6

Winning the pawn back, but perhaps I should have been more ambitious. I now believe 6 ... e6 is best; for example, 7 dxe6 Qxe6+ 8 Qe2 b5!? (8 ... Be7 9 Nf3 Qxe2+ 10 Kxe2 0-0 is good too) 9 c5 Bb7 10 Nf3 g6! with excellent compensation for Black.

7 Nf3!

After 7 dxc6 Qxc6, Black regains the pawn with equal chances.

7 ... cxd5 8 Ne5

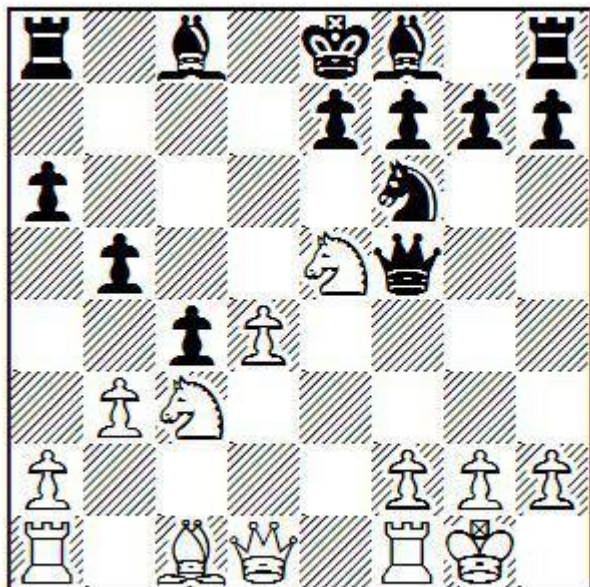
Here 8 c5! is a strange move given that Black is the one with a light-squared bishop, but the queenside bind outweighs this in the short term: 8 ... b6 (8 ... Qe6+ 9 Be3 Ng4 10 Qb3 favours White) 9 Ne5! Qe6 10 Nc3 (10 b4?! bxc5 11 bxc5 Nd7! with counterplay) 10 ...

bxc5 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Nxd7 Qxd7 13 Na4! with a slight advantage for White.

8 ... Qf5 9 0-0 dxc4!

Risky, but practically forced. For a change in this book, Black goes pawn-hunting in the opening.

10 Nc3 b5 11 b3



11 ... h5?

Definitely the wrong track, underestimating the danger to the king. After this move, Black's position rapidly deteriorates. Instead:

a) 11 ... b4 is interesting, with shades of some lines of the accepted Queen's Gambit and Slav openings: 12 Ne2 (or 12 Na4 c3 13 a3 e6 and Black is slightly better) 12 ... c3 13 a3 Bb7 14 axb4 Nd5 with an extremely complicated position in which Black's chances are not worse.

b) 11 ... cxb3! is best: 12 axb3 (12 Qxb3 Qe6! is a surprising retreat, but it seems to favour Black) 12 ... Bb7 13 Ba3 Rc8 (not 13 ... e6? 14 Nxb5!! axb5 15 Qe2 and White has the advantage) 14 Rc1 (now 14 Nxb5?? axb5 15 Qe2 fails to 15 ... Nd7!) 14 ... Nd7! 15 Re1 Nxe5 16 Rxe5 Qd7 with a small edge for Black. White has a huge lead in development, but there appears to be no concrete way to

prevent Black from developing and slowly consolidating the extra pawn.

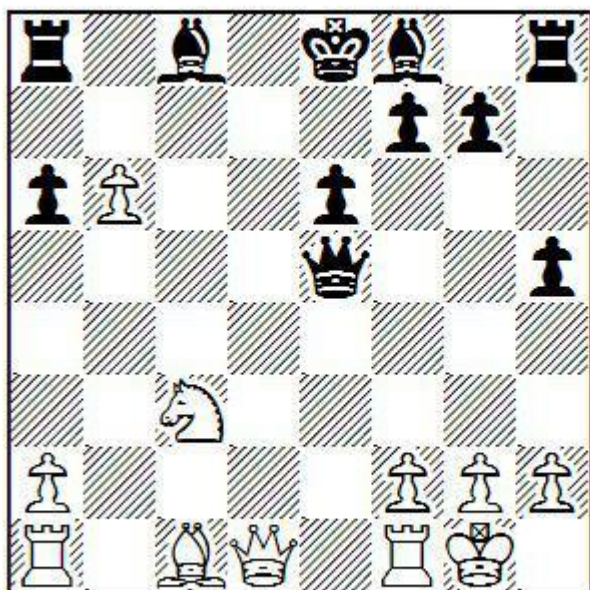
12 bxc4 e6 13 cxb5

Suddenly White, rather than Black, has the extra pawn. Moreover, Black's king has been stripped of some useful light-squared defenders.

13 ... Ng4 14 b6!

An excellent move. The strong Chinese grandmaster is more interested in checkmate than protecting a meagre pawn.

14 ... Nxe5 15 dxe5 Qxe5



16 b7!!

The brave foot soldier, who was sitting patiently on b2 only a few moves ago, sacrifices himself in order to fatally expose the black monarch.

16 ... Bxb7 17 Qa4+ Kd8 18 Rd1+ Bd6 19 Bf4! Qxc3 20 Rac1!

Very accurate.

20 ... Qxc1 21 Rxc1 Bxf4 22 Qxf4 Rc8 23 Qd6+ Ke8 24 Rxc8+ Bxc8 25 Qc7! 1-0

The finishing touch. Short and sweet!

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Bb5+

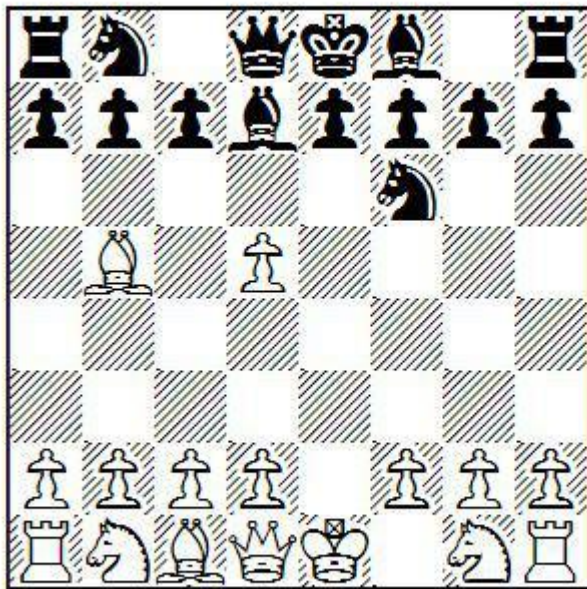
We will consider:

A: 3 ... Bd7

B: 3 ... Nbd7

A: 3 ... Bd7

This is by far the most popular move and, encouragingly, Black reaches Portuguese-style positions after the historically most frequent reply, 4 Bc4. However, in modern times White often prefers the calm retreat 4 Be2, aiming to reach a structure similar to a regular 2 ... Nf6, 3 ... Nxd5 Scandinavian, with Black's bishop somewhat awkwardly placed on f5. These positions are certainly playable for Black, and have been the choice of experts such as Sergei Krivoshey. Nonetheless, personally I have preferred to avoid this line, as playing a slightly passive, slightly inferior position out of the opening doesn't appeal to me. Hence, we will mainly focus on a new idea: the extremely rare gambit 4 Be2 c6!?

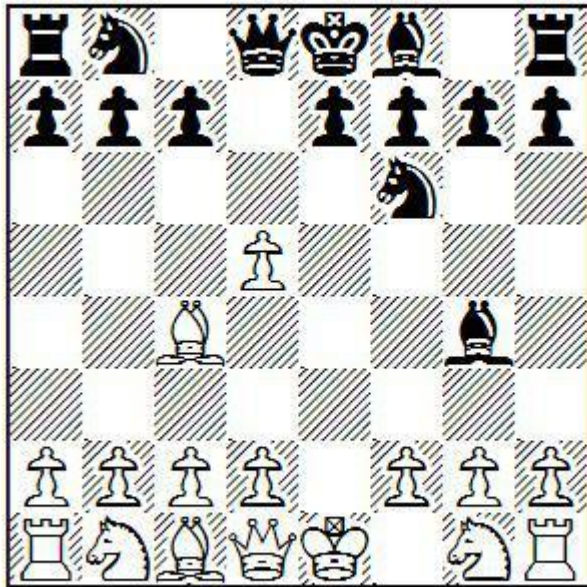


A1: 4 Bc4

A2: 4 Be2!

Instead, 4 Bxd7+ Qxd7! makes no sense at all. After 5 Nf3 (5 c4 c6! wins the pawn back and gives Black a slight advantage) 5 ... Qxd5, Black is more than okay, as White is essentially a tempo down on the Wuss (3 d4 Bg4 4 Be2 Bxe2 5 Qxe2 Qxd5).

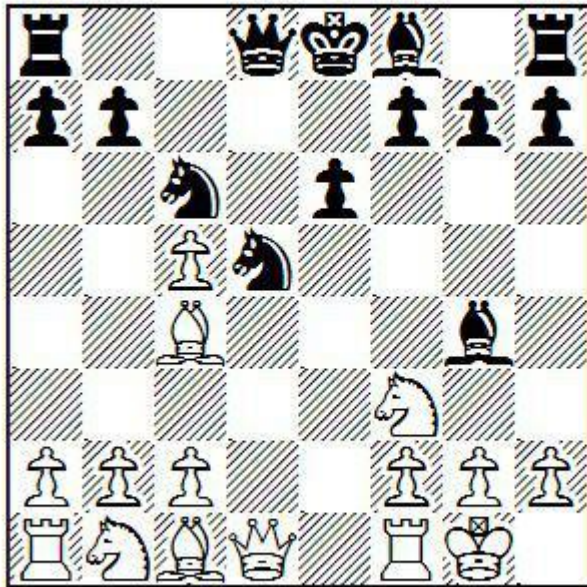
A1: 4 Bc4 Bg4!



After this familiar move, Black gains compensation not dissimilar to the Jadoul, as White is practically forced to weaken her kingside if she is striving for an opening advantage.

5 f3

5 Nf3 is relatively harmless, as Black can immediately attack the white centre: 5 ... Nxd5 6 0-0 e6 7 d4 c5! (7 ... Nc6 is also interesting, keeping open the option of castling on either side) 8 dxc5 (or 8 Re1 Nc6 9 dxc5 Ndb4 10 Na3 Qxd1 11 Rxd1 Bxc5 12 c3, F.Haenjes-In.Scholten, Montabaur 1994, and now 12 ... Nd5! 13 Bxd5 exd5 14 Rxd5 Bxa3 15 bxa3 Bxf3 16 gxf3 Rd8! gives Black excellent compensation in the endgame; White's extra pawn is useless and her structure is unlikely to win any beauty prizes) 8 ... Nc6! with excellent compensation for the pawn.



Note again how Black has achieved a substantial lead in development seemingly with ease. The following line is very natural and close to forced, and is a nice illustration of Black's persistent compensation in these endgames. Of course, you need not commit it to memory: 9 Bxd5 Qxd5 10 Qxd5 exd5 11 Re1+ Be7 12 Nbd2 0-0-0 13 b4! Bf6 14 Rb1 Rhe8 15 Bb2 Rxe1+ 16 Nxe1 Bxb2 17 Rxb2 Re8 18 Nd3 Re2 19 Nf1 Bf5 20 Nf4 Re4 21 Nxd5 Be6! and Black has all the winning chances in this ending.

5 ... Bf5

5 ... Bc8!? is not bad either.

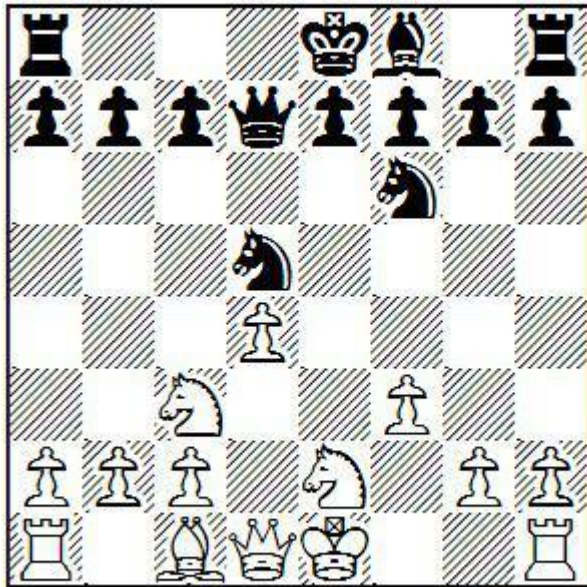
6 Nc3 Nbd7

6 ... c6!? also gives Black sufficient compensation; compare this position to line A in the Elbow: 3 d4 Bg4 4 Bb5+ c6!? 5 dxc6 Nxc6 6 f3?! Bf5.

7 Nge2

7 g4 is met by 7 ... Nb6!.

7 ... Nb6 8 Bb5+ Bd7 9 Bxd7+ Qxd7 10 d4 Nbxd5



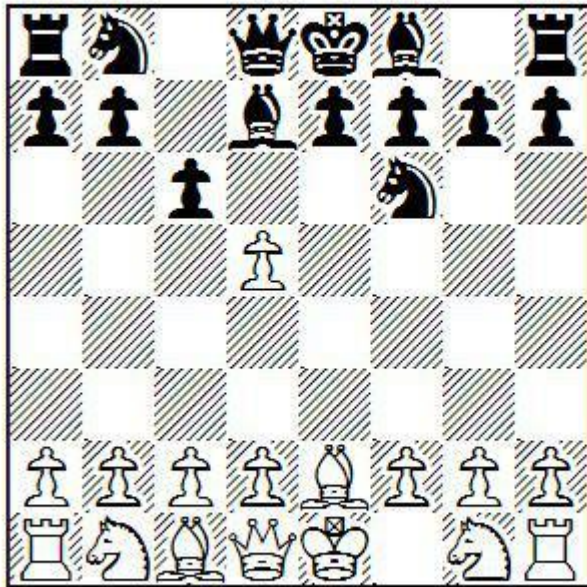
With equality, S.Bouaziz-Be.Larsen, Las Palmas Interzonal 1982.

A2: 4 Be2!

This is the move that has generally dissuaded me from playing 3 ... Bd7 in the past. After 4 ... Bf5 5 d4, Black will soon be forced back after recapturing on d5, leading to a solid but slightly inferior position in which White has scored well in practice. To quote the great Aussie band Powderfinger, that's not my kinda scene. Fortunately, there is another option:

4 ... c6!?

Instead, 4 ... Nxd5 5 d4 Bf5 6 Nf3 e6 7 0-0 is a fairly common sequence that leaves Black with a solid, but passive position in which she still needs to prove equality.



The text move of course makes regular appearances throughout our repertoire, and always seems to deliver a deceptively rich amount of compensation, even when White hasn't weakened her structure. In this case, Black's idea revolves around a quick ... e7-e5 before White has had time to finish her kingside development. From a practical perspective, Black also immediately puts the pressure back on White, whose conservative opening play suggests she was hoping for quieter, gambit-free waters.

Don't be fooled by Black's abysmal record from this position; the games in your database have largely featured weaker players on the black side who quickly failed to make the most of Black's dynamic potential. Rest assured; Black's compensation contains its measure of venom. Ultimately this sacrifice is not completely correct, which is another reason why I personally prefer 3 ... Nbd7 as my first choice. With very careful, accurate play, White seems to be able to reach a slightly preferable ending. However, there are plenty of traps and pitfalls to be navigated along the way.

Play might continue:

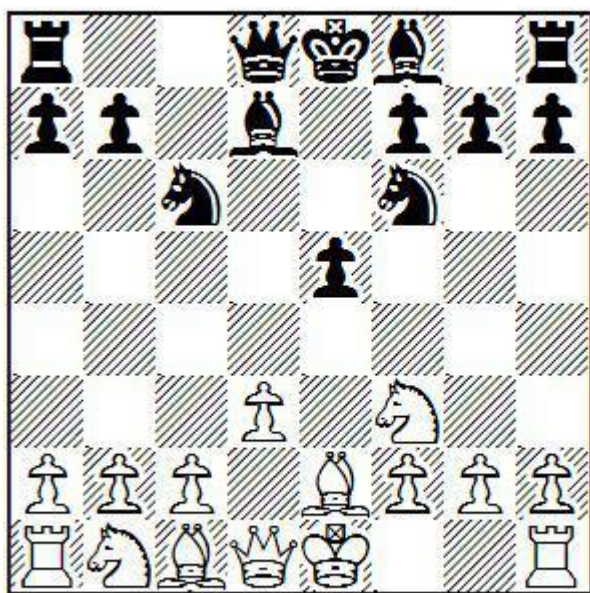
5 dxc6

5 d4 cxd5 gives White absolutely nothing. We have in fact transposed to an inferior (for White) version of the Exchange Caro-

Kann (1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5), where Black even has an extra tempo! To be fair, Black will soon move her queen's bishop again anyway, either to f5 or (after Nf3) to g4, but after sensible follow-up moves such as ... Nc6, ... e7-e6 etc, Black can already think about launching a minority attack on the queenside.

5 ... Nxc6 6 d4

Critical. Omitting d2-d4 is possible, but Black's extra space and development guarantee active compensation: 6 Nf3 e5! 7 d3 (or 7 0-0 e4! 8 Ne1 Bd6 with excellent compensation)

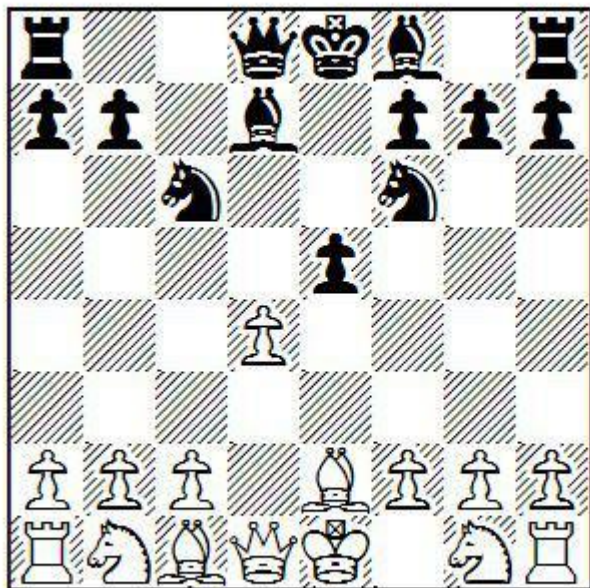


and now 7 ... Bc5 8 0-0 0-0 reminds me of a Danish Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 dxc3?! 4 Nxc3), with which gambiteers have achieved a very good score in tournament practice. In this reversed position, after 9 Bg5 h6 10 Bh4 Be6, Black has persistent activity; for example, 11 Nbd2 g5! 12 Bg3 Nh5 with the initiative.

Actually, the surprising 7 ... Be7!? may be even better. Black calmly builds up a strong lead in development, while White will soon find it difficult to unravel. After 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nc3 Rc8, White is uncomfortably passive and quite a few moves away from completing her development. The natural attempt to reclaim some space by 10 d4 will result in White's queen getting pushed around: 10 ... exd4 11

Nxd4 Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Re8! with ... Bc5 and ... Qb6 to come. Black has sufficient compensation.

6 ... e5!



This is absolutely necessary to justify Black's sacrifice. The game now becomes very open.

7 dxe5

Other moves:

a) 7 Nf3?! e4 8 Ne5 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Qa5+, followed by 10 ... Qxe5, gives Black a slight advantage.

b) 7 c3 exd4 8 cxd4 Bb4+ 9 Nc3 (or 9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Ne4! 11 Qe3 Bf5! with a dangerous initiative; note that 12 f3? is met by the crushing blow 12 ... Nb4!) 9 ... Ne4 10 Bd2 Qh4! and Black is again slightly better after the forced 11 Nxe4 Qxe4 12 Nf3 Nxd4! 13 Nxd4 Qxd4.

7 ... Nxe5! 8 Nf3

8 Nc3 Qe7! is awkward for White.

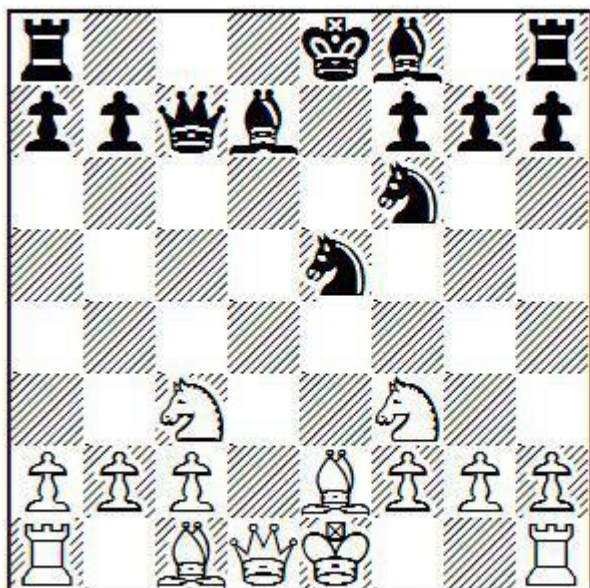
8 ... Qc7!

An interesting novelty. Black keeps open the option of castling queenside, which she would certainly consider after, say, 9 Nc3. On the other hand, against other moves Black has excellent play, with all of her pieces able to find superb posts with maximum activity. The

position has shades of the Von Hennig-Schara Gambit in the Tarrasch Queen's Gambit, another club favourite. Practically speaking, I certainly prefer Black, though I suspect that her compensation is not fully sufficient. Play might continue:

9 Nc3!

After 9 0-0 Bd6, Black has excellent play on the open lines; and 9 Nxe5 Qxe5 10 0-0 Bd6 11 g3 0-0 offers sufficient play as well, due to White's weakened kingside and slow development.



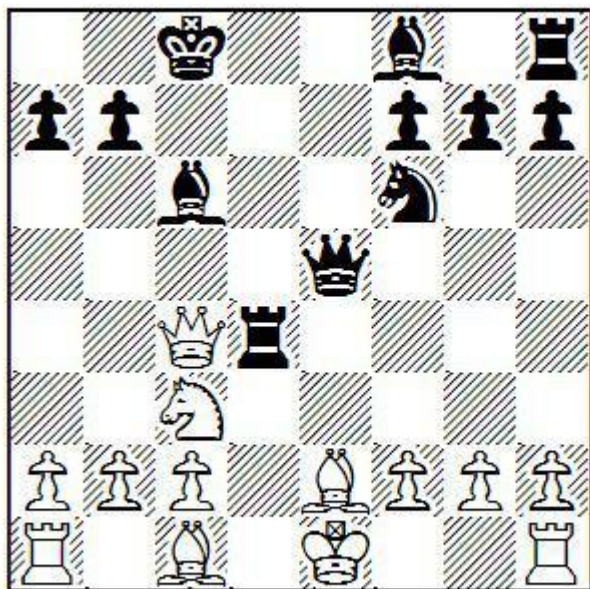
Here Black has two main paths to press forward with her initiative. We are in unexplored territory, so I would not suggest learning these lines by heart, but playing through the variations will improve your understanding of the typical sources of Black's compensation in these open positions.

9 ... Nxf3+!?

Extremely sharp, and probably best.

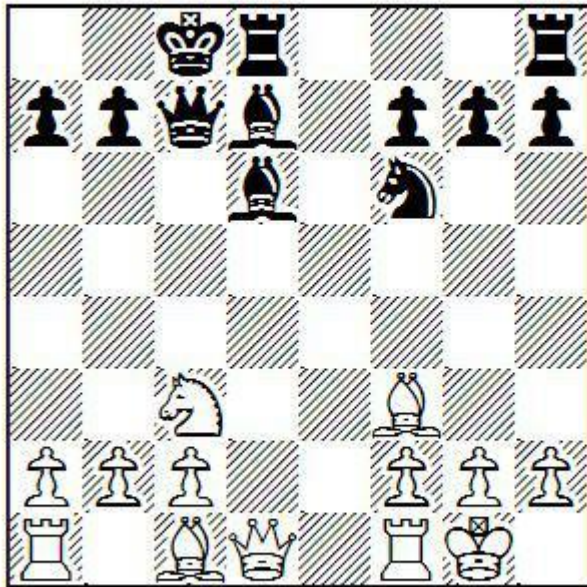
9 ... 0-0-0 is a key alternative, leading almost by force to an interesting exchange sacrifice in the endgame: 10 Nxe5 (10 0-0?! Bc6! 11 Qe1 Nxf3+ 12 Bxf3 Bxf3 13 gxf3 a6! and White's king will soon feel more than just a breeze) 10 ... Qxe5 11 Qd3! (White's only salvation lies in exchanging the queens as quickly as possible; after 11 0-0 Bd6 12 g3 Bh3 13 Re1 Bc5 14 Bg4+! Nxg4 15 Qxg4+ Bxg4

16 Rxe5 Bd4, Black has full compensation for the pawn) 11 ... Bc6
12 Qc4 Rd4



13 f4! (13 Qxf7?? Bb4! introduces killer threats all over the board; for example, 14 Be3 Re8! or 14 0-0 Bxc3 15 bxc3 Rh4! 16 h3 Bd5 17 Qxg7 Rg8, winning the queen) 13 ... Qc5! 14 Qxc5 Bxc5 15 Be3 Re8! (once again we see an example of Black's long-term compensation persisting well into the endgame) 16 Bxd4 Bxd4 17 Kd2! (after 17 Kf1 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Bxg2+ 19 Kxg2 Rxe2+ 20 Kf3 Rxc2, Black will pick up a second pawn for the exchange, leading to a level endgame) 17 ... Bxg2 18 Rhe1 Be3+ 19 Kd3 Bxf4 20 Bg4+! Kd8 21 Rxe8+ Kxe8, when White has successfully navigated the perilous opening path and has escaped into a favourable endgame. Black's active minor pieces and mass of kingside pawns combine to make a draw the most likely result, but White has the lion's share of the practical chances.

10 Bxf3 0-0-0 11 0-0 Bd6



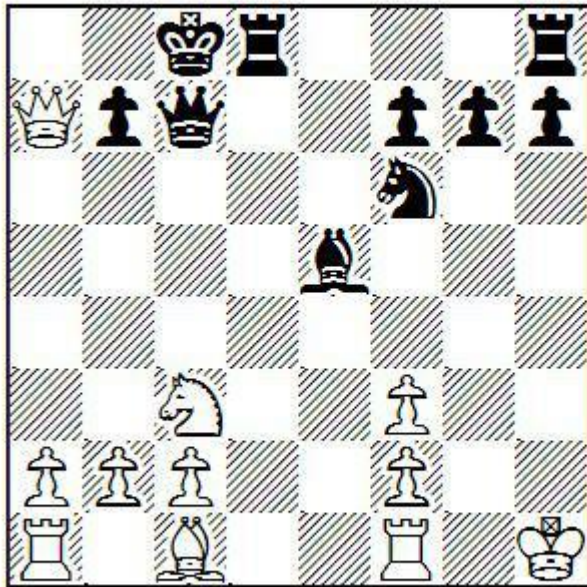
12 Qd4!

After 12 h3 Bxh3! (a standard trick) 13 Qe2! (13 gxh3?? Bh2+ wins the queen) 13 ... Be6 14 Nb5 Bc4 15 Nxc7 Bxe2 16 Bxe2 Kxc7, White has only a very slight pull.

12 ... Bxh2+ 13 Kh1 Bc6 14 Qxa7 Bxf3 15 gxf3

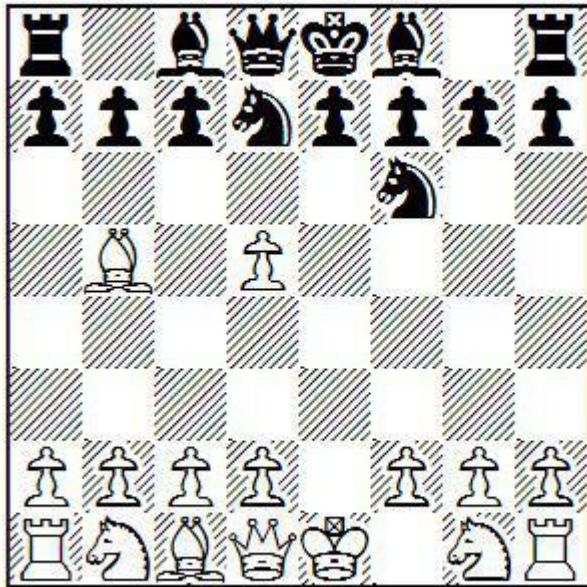
Not 15 Na4? Rd6!! and wins.

15 ... Be5



Both kings have had their defences blown open. Black's lead in development, coupled with her superior structure, offsets the pawn deficit, but the position remains extremely complicated. For example, 16 Re1 (16 Qa8+ Qb8 17 Qxb8+ Kxb8 18 Re1 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Rhe8 leads to an endgame in which White's horrific pawn structure is compensated by having one extra foot soldier; the game should end in a draw) 16 ... Rhe8 17 Kg2! (17 Be3 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Rd5! lifts the rook into the attack) 17 ... Bxc3 18 Rxe8 Rxe8 19 bxc3 Nd5! with an exciting endgame fight ahead, in which both sides have their fair share of the chances.

B: 3 ... Nbd7



This sideline has been my preferred choice to date, as I have believed it to be most in keeping with the spirit of our repertoire (though, as we have seen, the dynamic potential of the rare gambit 3 ... Bd7 4 Be2 c6!? may dispute this claim).

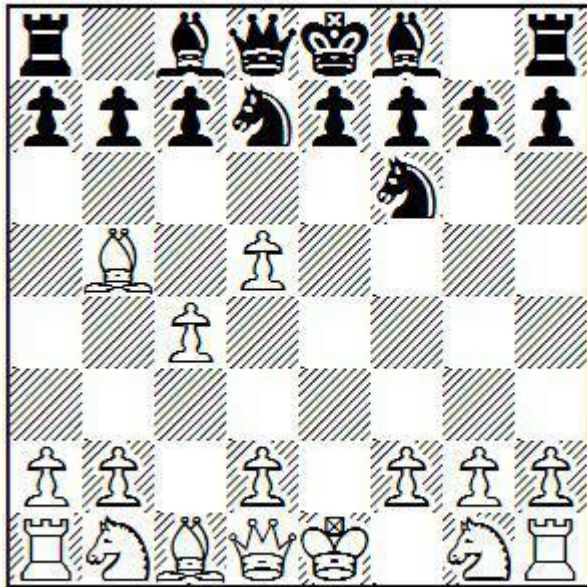
In this position, White has two main plans. The first, and most popular option is to hang on to the pawn with 4 c4. Black will naturally answer with 4 ... a6, followed by blasting open White's pawn centre with one of the standard ... b7-b5, ... c7-c6 or ... e7-e6 breaks. The second plan is to give the pawn back on d5 in exchange for easy development and a space advantage in the centre, which comes about after 4 Nc3 a6 5 Be2 or 4 d4 Nxd5 5 Nf3.

B1: 4 c4

B2: 4 Nc3

B3: 4 d4

B1: 4 c4



The critical main line, and the reason most players, illogically in my opinion, prefer 3 ... Bd7.

4 ... a6

We now have another fundamental branch, with both moves occurring equally frequently in practice:

B11: 5 Bxd7+

B12: 5 Ba4

B11: 5 Bxd7+

10 ... Bf5 11 Ne2 Bc5 12 Bb2, V.Anand-L.Galego, Oviedo (rapid) 1993, and here 12 ... bxc4 13 bxc4 Rb8! is clearly better for Black.

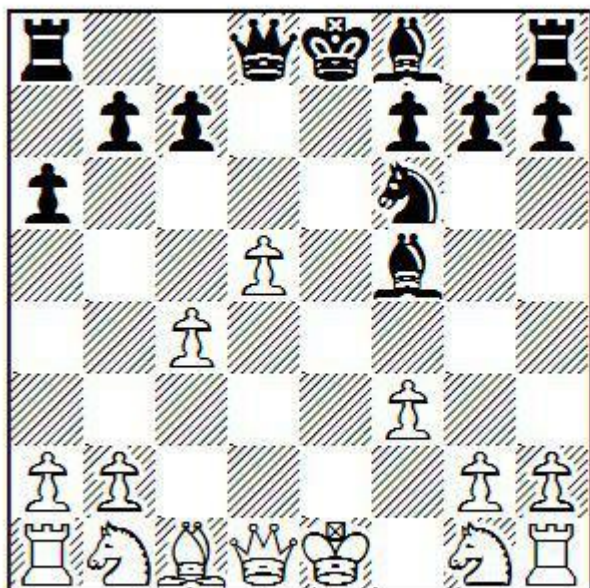
7 dxe6 Bxe6 8 d5 Bg4!

It took a few extra moves, but we got there in the end!

9 f3?!

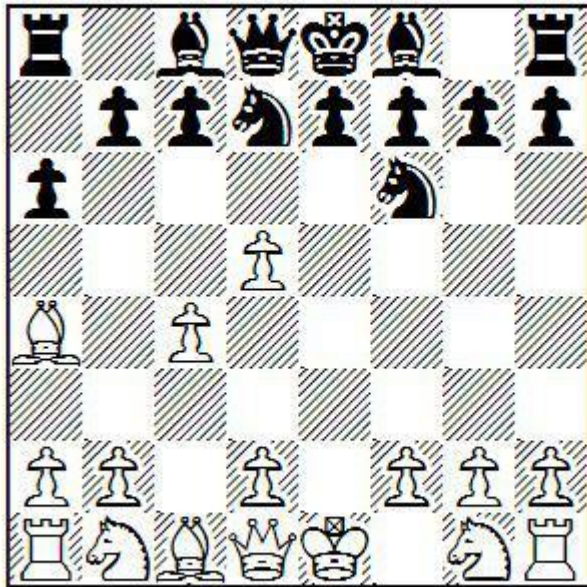
Instead, 9 Nf3 Bb4+ and 9 Ne2 Bc5 both leave Black with excellent compensation for the pawn.

9 ... Bf5



With every piece back on its starting square, White's position is already critical. Her only chance for survival is via the risky 10 Nc3 (10 Be3? Bb4+! gives Black a devastating attack; see Game 23, Movsesian-Damaso) 10 ... Bc5 11 g4!, when Black has the option to force a draw with 11 ... Nxg4, but should play for more with 11 ... Qe7+!, followed by ... Bg6.

B12: 5 Ba4



Surprisingly common in practice, despite giving Black easy, active play.

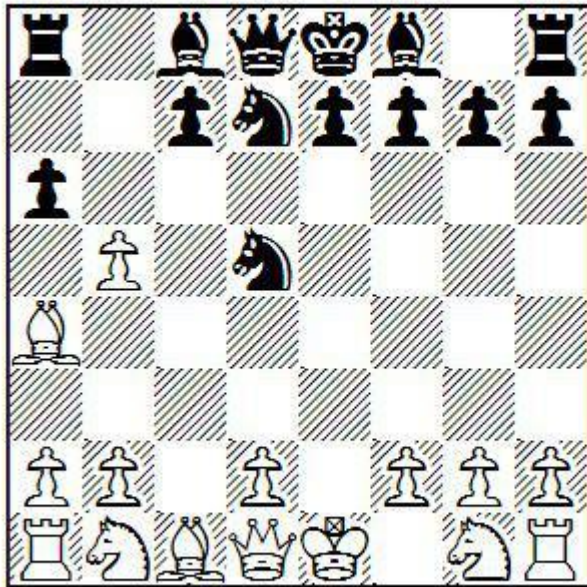
5 ... b5

Of course! Black is more than happy to exchange a flank pawn for White's annoying nugget on d5.

6 cxb5

6 Bb3? bxc4 7 Bxc4 Nb6 is already better for Black.

6 ... Nxd5



White will be able to secure an extra pawn for the long term by capturing on a6, but the resulting structure is positionally favourable to Black. An excellent outpost on d5 in front of White's isolated pawn, two semi-open files on the queenside, and a dangerously open long diagonal for her queen's bishop all amount to very promising, active compensation. Even if White holds out to an endgame, converting the extra material is extremely difficult with such a pawn structure, but even more importantly, surviving to an endgame is no easy feat!

A key theme to remember in these positions is the move ... N7b6, which Black will almost certainly play next, threatening to swap off White's light-squared bishop. If this is achieved, Black's own light-squared bishop will become a monster, shooting lasers towards the kingside. On the other hand, if White retreats the bishop from a4, Black can recapture on b5 and continue to build pressure on all sides of the board.

Transpositions are rife here, so it is more important to try to understand Black's thematic ideas than to remember exact variations. White usually develops her queen's knight, though other options have also been tried.

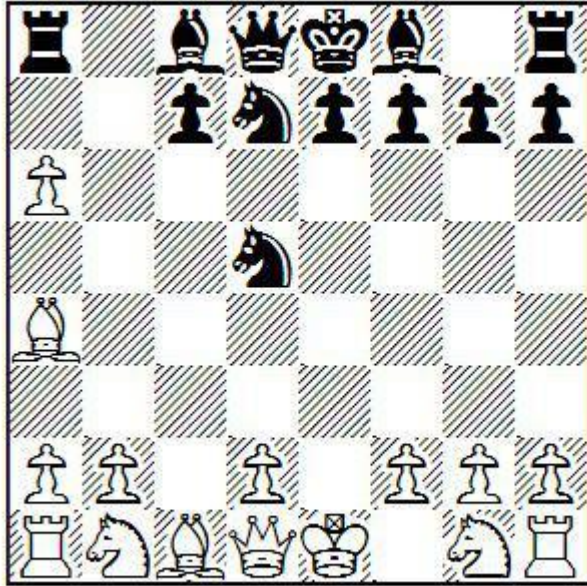
B121: 7 bxa6?!

B122: 7 d4

B123: 7 Nf3

B124: 7 Nc3

B121: 7 bxa6?!



White's greed will not go unpunished.

7 ... Bxa6

7 ... e6 leads to similar positions: 8 Nc3 Nb4 9 Qf3? (but 9 d4 Bxa6 is clearly better for Black, who has a crushing initiative) 9 ... Bxa6! 10 Bxd7+ Kxd7 11 Qxf7+ Be7 and Black is winning, *soumitra21* (2078)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

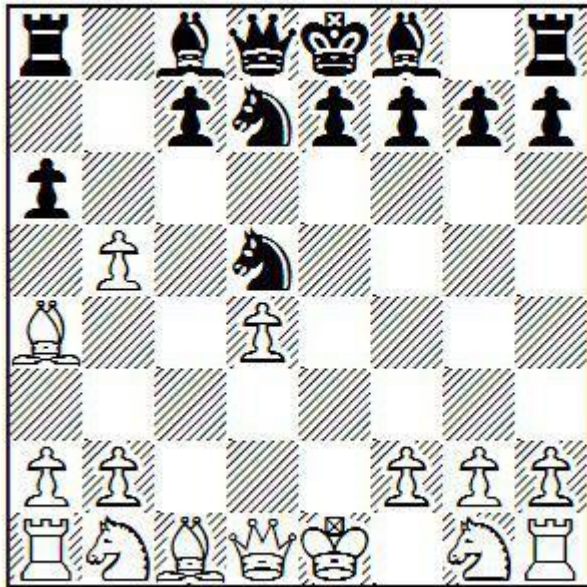
8 Nf3?

A fatal error. But 8 Ne2 Nb4 (8 ... Bxe2 9 Kxe2 e6 is good too) 9 0-0 Bxe2 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Qxe2 Qd3! gives Black an excellent position anyway; White's queenside forces are paralysed.

8 ... Nf4!

Threatening mate in one! White is lost. Pa.Kowalczyk-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014, concluded 9 d3 Nxd3+ 10 Kd2 e6 11 Qc2 Bb4+ 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Kd1 N7c5 14 Bd2 Bxc3 15 bxc3 Nxf2+ 16 Kc1 Bd3 0-1.

B122: 7 d4



7 ... N5b6!

A common idea in this variation. White cannot afford to have her white-squared bishop exchanged, since her black counterpart will run rampant on the h1-a8 and f1-a6 diagonals.

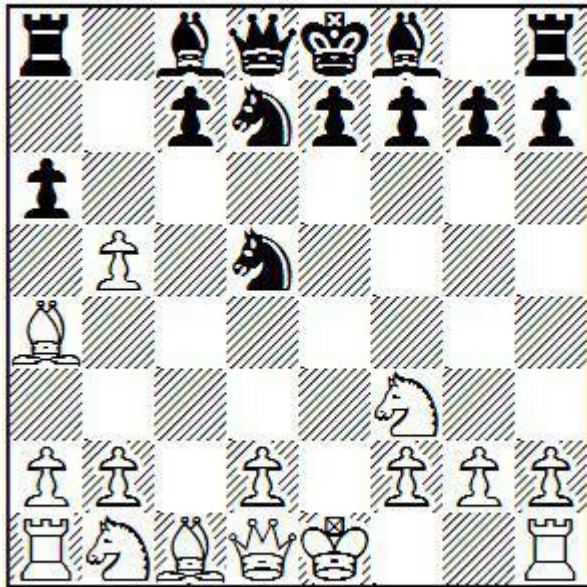
8 Bb3 e6

Giving White one more chance to drink from the poisoned chalice on a6.

9 Nf3 axb5 10 0-0 Be7

Black is slightly better, with easy play against White's isolated pawn and vulnerable queenside, Ro.Bauer-Th.Schmitz, German League 2008.

B123: 7 Nf3



A much better try than the preceding two attempts.

7 ... N5b6!

Again we see this important retreat.

8 Bc2

8 0-0?! Nxa4 9 Qxa4 Bb7 is fantastic for Black.

8 ... axb5 9 Be4!

The only move to make sense of her opening play. White takes the opportunity to threaten Black's rook at the moment of most inconvenience, as well as occupying the important long diagonal.

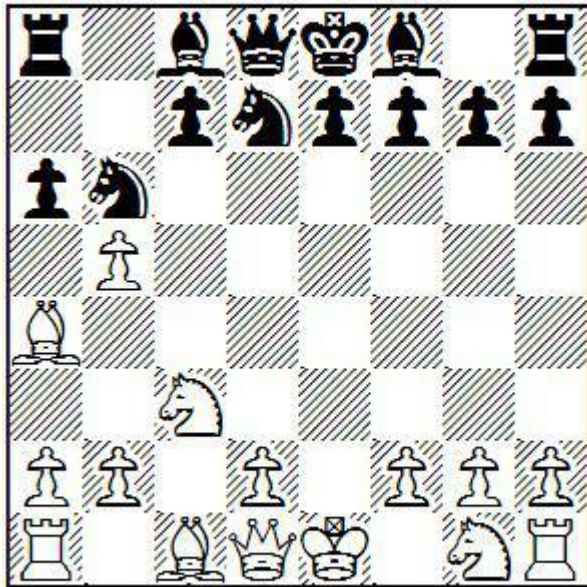
9 ... Rb8 10 0-0

10 Nd4? Ne5! 11 Nc6 Nxc6 12 Bxc6+ Bd7 is slightly better for Black, Pa.Nguyen-S.Midoux, Provence 1994.

10 ... e6

The position is level.

B124: 7 Nc3 N5b6!



8 Bb3

Instead, 8 Nf3?! Nxa4 9 Qxa4 Bb7 is bad news for White; while 8 Bc2 axb5 9 Nxb5 e6 10 Nf3 Ba6 11 Nc3 c5 gives Black sufficient compensation, with excellent lines for her pieces and a weak d-pawn to target.

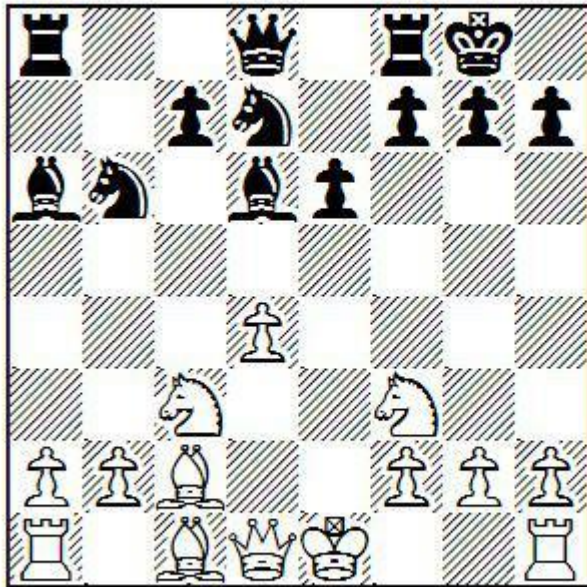
8 ... e6

8 ... Nc5? 9 Bxf7+! Kxf7 10 Qh5+ is not what the doctor ordered.

9 d4 axb5 10 Nxb5 Ba6 11 Nc3 Bd6 12 Nf3?!

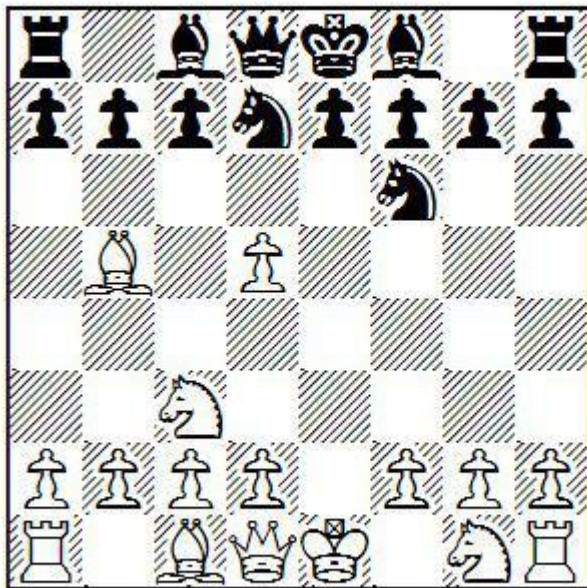
Giving up on castling, though White's position isn't looking too rosy in any case: 12 Nge2 Qh4 and 12 Ne4 Bb4+ 13 Bd2 Qh4! 14 Bc2 Nd5 both leave Black with sufficient compensation and an easier game.

12 ... 0-0 13 Bc2



This was G.M.Marinelli-G.Contini, Bratto 2004; and now Black could have really turned the screws by playing 13 ... e5! with a decisive opening of the e-file.

B2: 4 Nc3

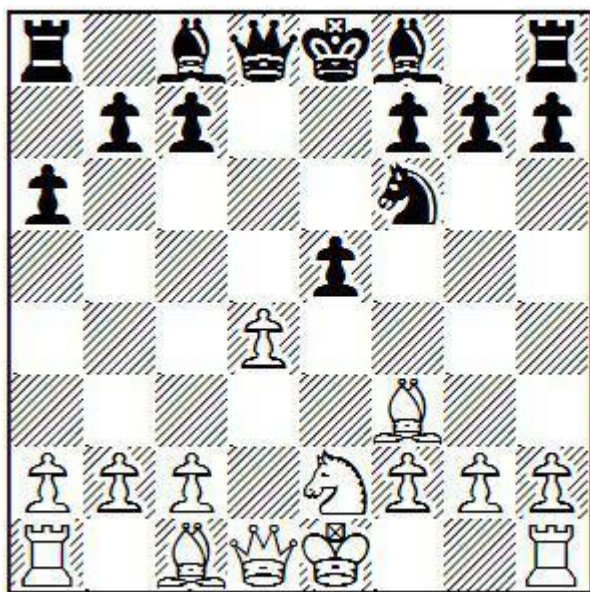


An insipid choice. The knight on d7 hinders Black's usual activity via ... Bg4 and ... Qxd5, so she is unlikely to drum up early attacking chances. However, White should prefer 4 d4 if she wishes to play this way, as the extra tempo not spent developing her kingside gives Black the extra time she needs to strike in the centre.

4 ... a6 5 Be2

Retreating the other way offers White nothing either: 5 Ba4 b5 6 Bb3 Bb7 7 Nf3 Nc5 (7 ... b4 is equal, but I prefer to take the bishop pair) 8 d4 Nxb3 9 axb3 Nxd5 with an excellent position; for example, 10 Nxd5 (or 10 0-0 Nxc3 11 bxc3 e6 12 Ba3 Bd6 13 Bxd6 cxd6 14 Nd2?! Qg5! 15 f3? Qe3+!, winning in *kambizs* (2142)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013) 10 ... Qxd5 11 Be3 e6 12 Rc1 Qh5 13 0-0 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Qxf3 15 gxf3 Bd6 with a comfortable endgame advantage in *jernej1998* (2137)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

5 ... Nb6 6 Bf3 Nbx d5 7 Nxd5 Nxd5 8 Ne2 e5! 9 d4 Nf6!

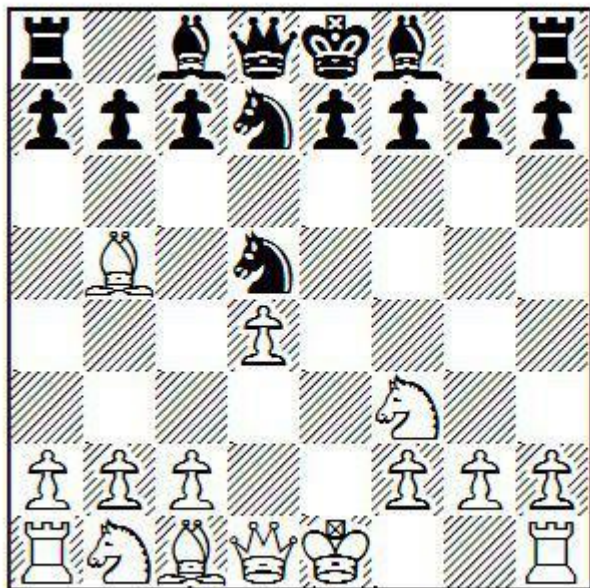


A nice touch to equalize, I.Morovic Fernandez-L.Galego, Istanbul Olympiad 2000. Capturing the pawn is too risky on account of the white king's vulnerability after the queen exchange on d1 and an ensuing ... Ng4.

B3: 4 d4

A respectable alternative that is for some reason far less popular, but deserves attention.

4 ... Nxd5 5 Nf3



A solid choice, again utilizing the temporary pin on the d7-knight to prevent Black's typical activity until White is safely developed and castled. For that reason alone, this move deserves to be more popular. Bizarrely, the game will soon transpose into a variation from Alekhine's Defence: after 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 dxe5 5 Nxe5 Nd7 6 Nf3, we reach the diagram position with White's bishop still on f1. As this bishop will soon retreat anyway, either voluntarily or after ... c7-c6, we will likely reach an exact transposition. From a practical perspective, Black has managed to avoid several of White's more critical alternatives from an Alekhine's move-order; in particular, 6 Nxf7! is considered by current theory (in correspondence chess) to refute Black's specific sequence. All the same, White's position must still be considered slightly more pleasant. Play becomes more positional in nature, which is why, unusually for our system, Black has the time to fianchetto her king's bishop, should she prefer. However, my preference is to immediately kick the bishop with 5 ... c6.

5 ... c6

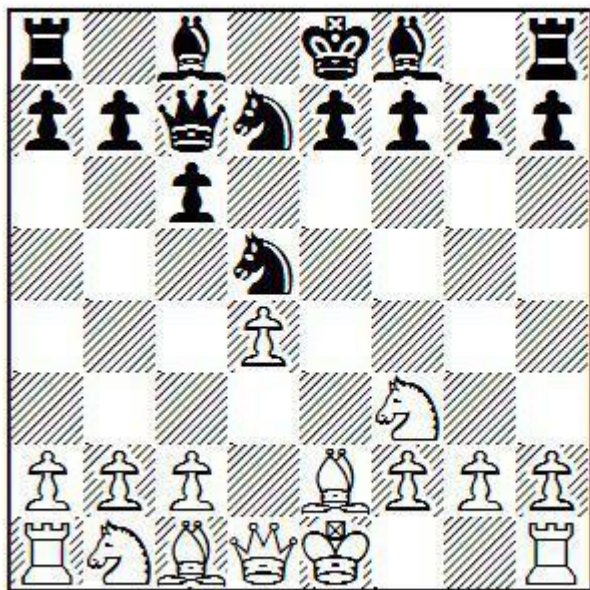
If Black fianchettoes with 5 ... g6, White should voluntarily retreat her b5-bishop – so why then should we help it along? We will see that Black has a concrete idea in mind.

Instead, 5 ... g6!? will soon transpose into Alekhine's Defence, as White's bishop is misplaced and will retreat of its own accord. Black should look to strike quickly in the centre:

a) 6 0-0 Bg7 7 Re1 (or 7 Be2 c5!? 8 c4 Nc7 9 d5 b5! 10 cxb5 Nb6! and Black is fine, or 10 d6 Ne6 11 cxb5 0-0! with excellent compensation) 7 ... 0-0 8 Bg5 c5! 9 Nc3 Nxc3 10 bxc3, A.Rodriguez Cespedes-R.Damaso, Linares 1997, and now 10 ... Nf6! is equal.

b) 6 Be2! at once is probably best: 6 ... Bg7 7 c4 N5f6 8 0-0 c5 9 Nc3 (or again 9 d5 b5!) 9 ... cxd4 10 Qxd4 b6 gives White a slight advantage on account of her (for a change) lead in development. However, Black shouldn't experience too many problems so long as she completes her own development carefully; the dynamic potential of the two fianchettoed black bishops should not be underestimated, and reminds one of a Grünfeld Defence.

6 Be2 Qc7!

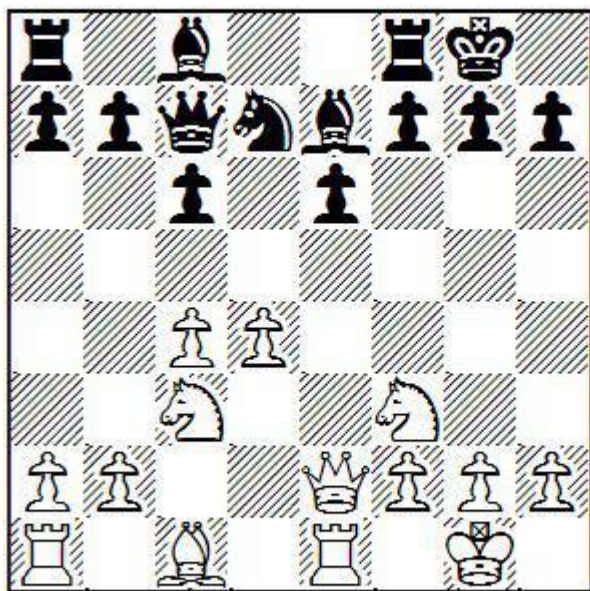


The point. Black secures the f4-square before White has a chance to play c2-c4.

7 0-0 e6

The immediate 7 ... Nf4!? is also possible: 8 Bc4 e6 9 Re1 Bd6 10 Bf1 was E.L'Ami-D.Smerdon, World Junior Championships, Kochin 2004, and now Black should have preferred 10 ... 0-0 in order to answer 11 c4 with the sensible 11 ... b6 with equality.

8 c4 Nf4 9 Nc3 Be7 10 Re1 Nxe2+ 11 Qxe2 0-0



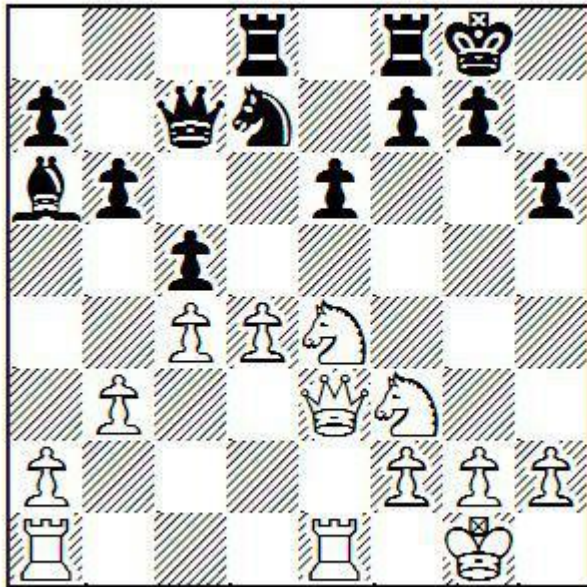
White has a healthy space advantage, but Black is solid and for the moment retains the bishop pair. So long as Black can activate her c8-bishop, equality is assured.

By transposition, we are now following V.Anand-S.Mamedyarov, Nice (blindfold rapid) 2008, which began as an Alekhine's Defence and continued:

12 Bg5

White understandably seeks to eliminate Black's positional trump, although the exchange also eases Black's defences.

12 ... Bxg5 13 Nxg5 h6 14 Nf3 b6! 15 Qe3 Ba6 16 b3 Rad8 17 Ne4 c5!



Black has patiently developed within cramped confines and is rewarded with this desirable break, which equalizes. In the game the thrice World Champion responded with 18 d5?! (ambitious, and the only try for an advantage, though a risky one: the d-pawn may seem menacing, but White is dangerously close to overextending) 18 ... exd5 19 cxd5 Rfe8! 20 d6 Qc6 21 Qf4, and here 21 ... Bb7! would expose the fragility of White's position. The centralized knight is kicked back, after which the d6-pawn is left horribly exposed. Black is clearly better.

Section Four – Conclusion

3 Bb5+ appears quite frequently in practice, for no logical reason that I can discern. Black has a pleasant choice. To my mind, blocking with 3 ... Nbd7 has always made a lot of sense; in the resulting structures, Black's possession of the bishop pair should not be underestimated once the position begins to open up. I have always enjoyed playing this variation. As we have seen, Black's game is simple, easy to understand and full of explosive potential.

Although the more popular 3 ... Bd7 has never really appealed to me, I must confess that the brazen gambit 4 Be2 c6!? holds a certain fascination. From a theoretical perspective there is probably no need

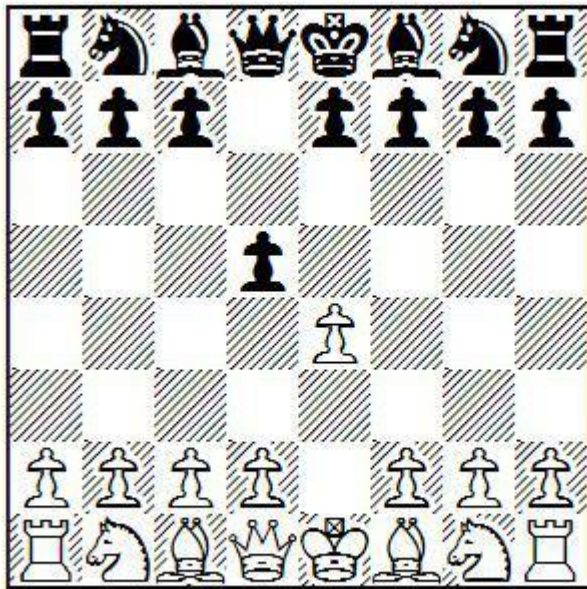
for Black to venture down this path in the search for a full share of the chances, but the positions are relatively unexplored and certainly look like a lot of fun.

In short, Black seems to be holding up very well against the early check.

Section Five

Odds and Ends

1 e4 d5



Every now and then you will face an opponent who, either through shock, fear or just sheer spite, will refuse to engage in the tactical anarchy that comprises the previous four sections. In the final part of the book, we will briefly consider White's lesser alternatives that, nonetheless, rear their ugly heads on occasion.

Despite being completely harmless, 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nc3 appears quite often in practice. In fact, it has historically been played more frequently than 3 Nf3, which, as we saw, is a serious attempt at an advantage. The same cannot be said for the queen's knight's move, but because you will almost certainly face this variation with some regularity, I have covered it in far more detail than typically accorded by previous authors of the Scandinavian. Spend the time to understand this system; it is definitely a worthy investment.

The other variations covered in this section are far less common. 2 Nc3 is simply a bad move in my opinion, although it is hard to believe that White can actually be worse. Black should take the chance to grab space and the initiative with 2 ... d4!, after which she has excellent chances to claim an advantage.

2 d4?! initiates the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, which retains a small but devoted following at club levels. In a sense, countering Black's sacrifice with a gambit of her own is an interesting psychological ploy by White. And in fact, you can easily get in trouble as Black with natural moves if you don't know what you're doing. You may only face this variation roughly one time in a hundred, but your opponent likely plays it exclusively and will thus be much better versed in its subtleties. For this reason, I have again chosen to devote more space to the BDG than has commonly been considered by other authors. However, there's no reason to fear. The gambit really is unsound, and with just a little bit of memorization you can guarantee yourself a hefty opening advantage whenever you find yourself facing the BDG.

We'll finish things off with a short look at 2 e5?!. Like its cousin 2 Nc3, this move allows Black to transpose to an improved version of a French or Caro-Kann, should you wish it. However, once again I am going to recommend playing for the maximum. With just a couple of accurate moves, Black can emerge from the opening with at least a slight advantage.

In short, while nothing in this chapter is theoretically scary, it is worth spending the time to learn the appropriate remedies to these lesser alternatives. Doing so will help you transform your opening positions from easy equality into targeted advantages, and help you turn those half points into full ones.

Game 25

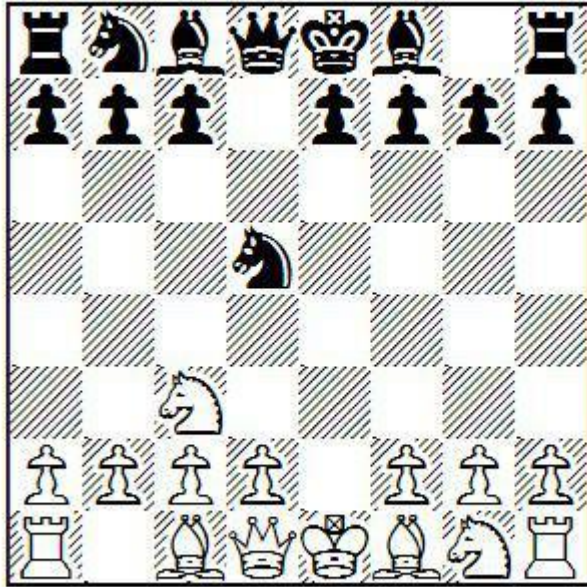
B.Kovanova-Hou Yifan

Beijing (rapid) 2008

1 e4 d5

The game's true move-order saw an Alekhine's Defence: 1 ... Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 exd5 etc.

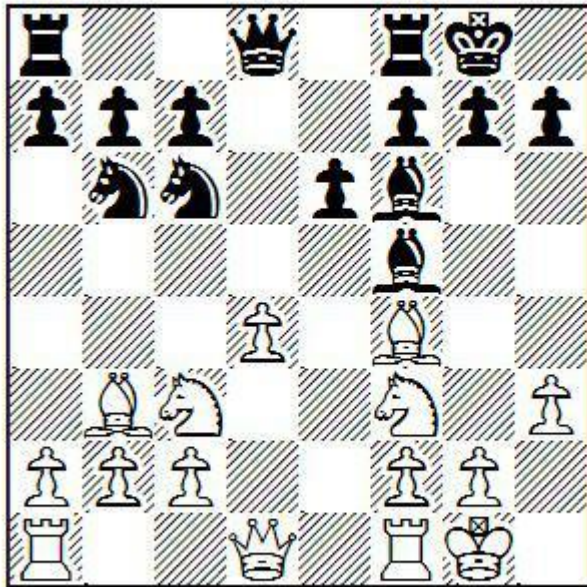
2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nxd5



This unambitious variation by White is extremely common in practice, so it is definitely worth paying more attention to this chapter than you may think it deserves. The good news is that Black can equalize comfortably against this approach, as well as retaining enough life in the position to keep winning chances. Let's see how the future Women's World Champion went about this.

4 Bc4 Nb6 5 Bb3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bf5 7 a4!?

7 d4 e6 8 0-0 is much more common, and here I generally prefer to develop my bishop to e7, from where it controls g5 and can pressure the centre from f6. After 8 ... Be7 9 Bf4 0-0 10 h3 (10 d5 exd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Qxd5 Qxd5 13 Bxd5 Nb4 is equal) 10 ... Bf6!, Black has no problems at all.

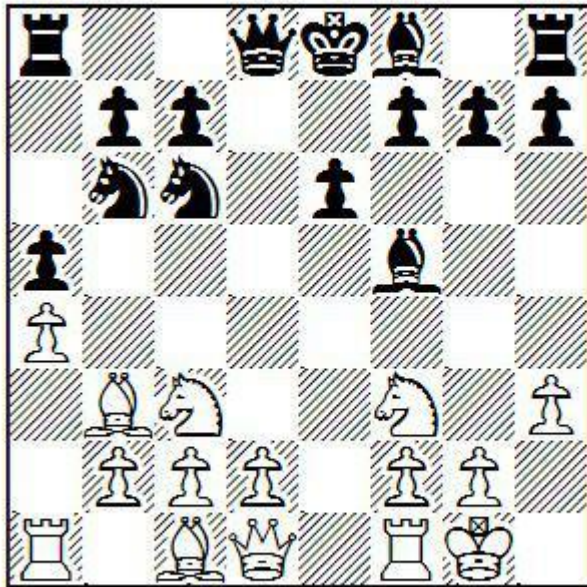


For example, 11 Nb5 Rc8 12 c3 a6 13 Na3 Be4!? 14 Nc4 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Na5! 16 Bd3?! Bxd3 17 Qxd3 c5! and Black was clearly better in Gi.Nguyen-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2004.

7 ... a5

7 ... Na5 8 Ba2 e6 makes more sense to me, but Hou's approach is also respectable.

8 0-0 e6 9 h3



White usually flicks this in at some point, as otherwise a future ... Bg4 can be quite annoying.

9 ... Bd6

9 ... Be7 10 d4 0-0 is safe enough. Hou plays more ambitiously, inviting White to (over)extend her centre.

10 d4 0-0 11 Nb5 h6 12 c4

Tempting, but after this the white pawns will feel a little tender, while the black knight will enjoy the new outpost on b4.

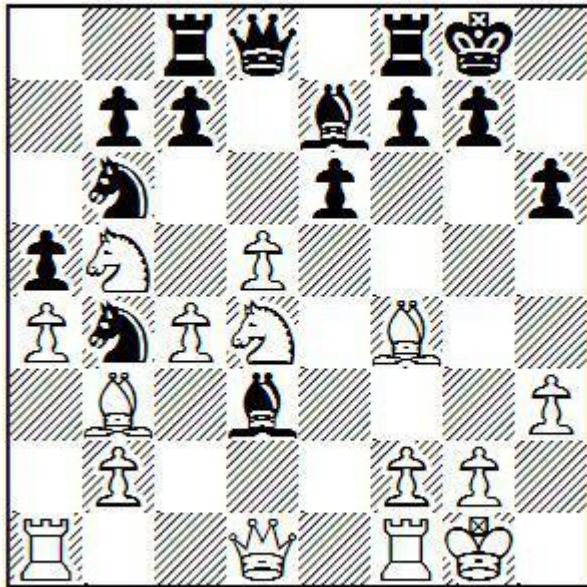
12 ... Be7! 13 Bf4 Rc8 14 d5!?

Kovanova again chooses the most ambitious option, but the black pieces are well placed to deal with this expansion. Instead, 14 Qe2 Nb4 15 Rad1 c6 16 Nc3 Nd7 is equal.

14 ... Nb4 15 Nfd4?

A significant error, presumably missing Black's reply. Up until now, White was still within the range of holding the balance, and 15 dxe6 Bxe6 16 Qe2 would have given her good chances to equalize in the endgame arising after 16 ... Qd3! 17 Qxd3 Nxd3 18 Bxc7 Nc5!.

15 ... Bd3!



A big shot; fortunately for White, she can sacrifice the exchange for some practical complication.

16 dxe6! Bxf1 17 Kxf1 c5?!

I would have preferred to keep the light squares under control with 17 ... c6 18 Nc3 Bc5!, when Black is clearly better.

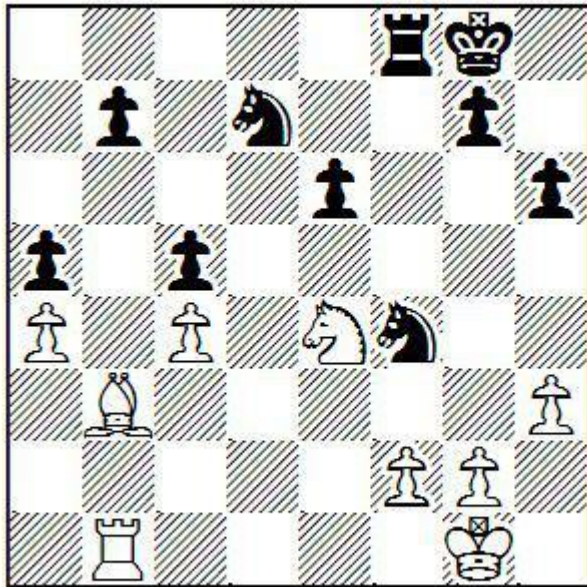
18 Nf5 fxe6 19 Nxe7+ Qxe7 20 Bd6 Qf6 21 Bxf8 Rxf8

Black still has the advantage thanks to the horrible bishop on b3 and White's weak pawns, but the situation is no longer so clear.

22 Qe2 Nd3! 23 Kg1 Nf4

23 ... Qg6! was better for Black, with ... Nf4 coming.

24 Qe4 Qxb2 25 Rb1 Qe2 26 Nc3! Qxe4 27 Nxe4 Nd7



28 Rd1??

White has fought back valiantly, but this careless move, perhaps a product of time pressure, throws it away again. It was absolutely essential to prevent Black establishing a knight on the d4-outpost: 28 Bd1! b6 29 Bg4! gives White excellent chances to hold a draw.

28 ... Ne2+! 29 Kf1 Nd4 30 Ba2 b6

Having stabilized the dark squares, Black has a safe extra pawn as well as a dominant position.

31 Bb1 Kf7 32 Bd3 Ke7 33 Nc3? Ne5 34 Nb5 Nxb5 35 axb5 Rd8 0-1

Game 26

B.Zlatanovic-G.Pap

Paracin 2012

1 e4

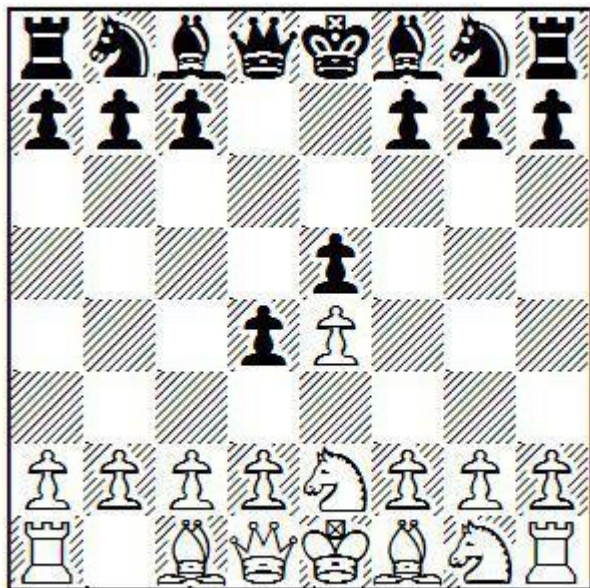
This time the actual move-order was 1 Nc3 d5 2 e4, the so-called Dunst (or Van Geet) opening.

1 ... d5 2 Nc3

This approach is surprisingly common at lower levels. It may be somewhat hypocritical of me to lambast 'unprincipled' opening play, but there's something slightly unsavoury about White inviting Black to obtain more space, the initiative, and a fundamental advantage as

early as move two. In saying that, I must confess to having played this way with White in the occasional blitz game!

2 ... d4! 3 Nce2 e5



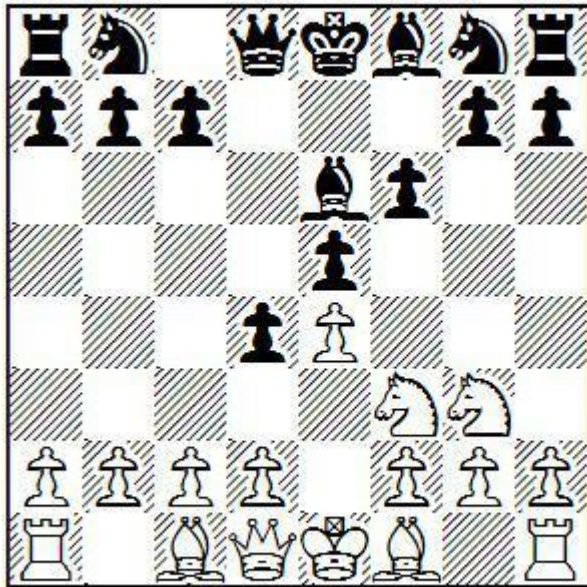
There's no use looking a gift horse in the mouth; Black should take it all! White's only hope is to try to transpose into a reversed King's Indian variation in which the extra move proves useful. The easiest way for Black to avoid this is simply to omit ... c7-c5, instead angling for a reversed Modern Defence structure. White will soon find that the early transfer of her knight to the kingside will leave her minor pieces tripping over themselves. One thing to remember with Black is that she should prevent White's bishop coming to c4, if it is threatened, by playing an early ... Be6.

4 Ng3

Other moves:

- a) 4 f4?! exf4 5 Nxf4 Bd6 is already slightly better for Black.
- b) 4 Nf3 Bd6 5 Ng3 Be6! also favours Black.
- c) 4 d3 Nc6 5 g3 is very common, after which I suggest throwing White off her path with 5 ... h5!? – see the theory section for more details.

4 ... Be6! 5 Nf3 f6



A harmonious set-up. White's big problem is her bishop on f1, which has no natural development. Hemming it in on e2 with d2-d3 will doom it to passivity in the middlegame, ensuring Black of a lasting advantage.

6 Bd3

An ugly choice. 6 b3!? is a radical attempt to solve the problem of the f1-bishop, but 6 ... Nc6 7 Bc4 Bxc4 8 bxc4 d3! favours Black, while 6 Bb5+ c6 7 Ba4 Na6 8 Bb3 is very time consuming – see the theory.

6 ... Ne7 7 Nh4?

But this is too much. I have often found in this system that opponents overestimate the potential for kingside activity. In principle, Black's space advantage and solid development don't justify this sort of ambition from White. Still, 7 0-0 h5!? 8 c3 c5 is clearly in Black's favour.

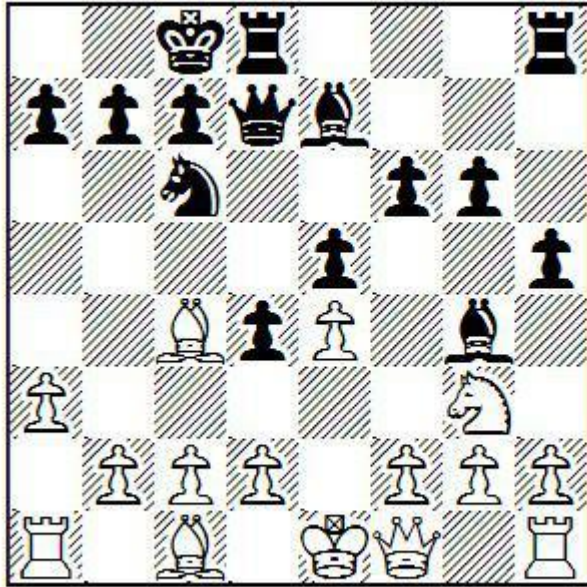
7 ... Qd7 8 Qe2 Bg4

Note that 8 ... g5? would be a serious positional error, gifting the white knights new homes on h5 and f5.

9 Qf1

Instead, 9 f3 Be6 10 Bc4 Nbc6 is clearly better for Black. The white knights look quite ridiculous, desperately hoping for an outpost to appear on f5 after a ... g7-g5 push that of course isn't coming.

9 ... Nbc6 10 Nhf5 g6! 11 Nxe7 Bxe7 12 a3 0-0-0 13 Bc4 h5



Having completed the development stage, Black is ready to launch aggressive initiatives. White, on the other hand, is a long way from being ready for anything. Objectively, White is already lost.

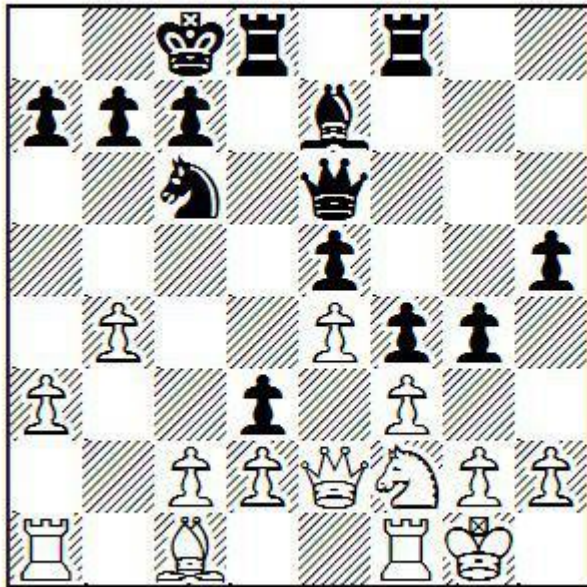
14 f3 Be6 15 Bxe6 Qxe6 16 Qd3 Rhf8

16 ... h4 17 Ne2 h3 18 g3 Nb8! was another attractive option.

17 0-0 f5 18 b4 f4 19 Nh1 g5

Queenside castling usually indicates the need for swift attacks by both sides, but here the white attack is desperately lagging behind. Meanwhile, the black forces are ready to touch down.

20 Nf2 g4 21 Qe2 d3!



A lovely way to introduce the black knight into the fray.

22 Nxd3 Nd4 23 Qd1 gxf3 24 Rxf3

24 gxf3 loses even more swiftly: 24 ... Rg8+ 25 Kh1 Bh4 26 Nf2 Qg6 27 Rg1 Qxg1+ 28 Qxg1 Rxg1+ 29 Kxg1 Rg8+ etc.

24 ... Nxf3+ 25 Qxf3 Qc4! 26 Nf2 Qxc2 27 Qxh5 Kb8 28 Qd1 Qc4 29 Bb2 Bh4!

Offering no respite.

30 Bxe5 Bxf2+ 31 Kxf2 Qxe4 32 Bc3 f3 33 gxf3 Rd3 0-1

Black will checkmate in at most seven more moves.

Game 27

R.J.Felber-Wang Mong Lin

Correspondence 1997

1 e4

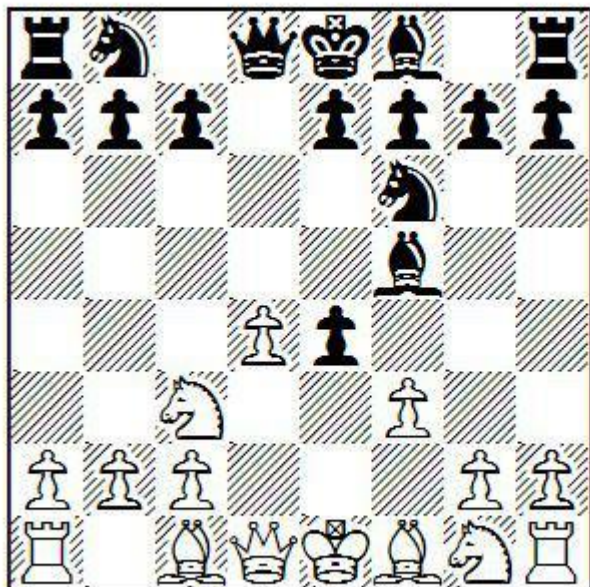
This game, too, arose via a different move-order: 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 e4 dxe4.

1 ... d5 2 d4?!

Risky openings like the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit were a little more popular in correspondence chess back in the time when computer assistance wasn't allowed. These days, you are more

likely to face the BDG across the board at club levels against the stereotypical devotee of her favourite weapon. You know the type: one with a fanatical obsession to an unprincipled, speculative gambit, who cannot be swayed by proper mainstream theory. Wait a minute; this description sounds eerily familiar ...

2 ... dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3 Bf5!



It's definitely best to take on the gambit. Don't worry; there's not much theory to learn, so long as you remember just a couple of important branches.

5 g4

Probably White's best try. Here's what you need to know about the main alternative: 5 fxe4 (5 Bg5 Nbd7 and 5 Bc4 e6! are less threatening) 5 ... Nxe4 6 Qf3 Nxc3! and now you should remember that Black's next move is ... e7-e6; i.e. 7 bxc3 (or 7 Qxf5 e6!, followed by ... Nd5; Black is clearly better) 7 ... e6! 8 Qxb7 Nd7 gives back the pawn, but Black's activity and lead in development guarantee a healthy advantage.

5 ... Bg6 6 g5

6 h4 should be met by 6 ... h6!.

6 ... Nd5 7 Nxe4 e6

Here 7 ... e5! is stronger, and in my opinion Black is already better. The only critical line that you should tuck away in the memory bank continues 8 dxe5 Nc6! 9 Bc4 Bb4+! 10 c3 Bxe4! 11 fxe4 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bxc3+ 13 Bd2 Qd4! 14 Bxf7+ Ke7! with a clear advantage to Black.

8 h4

If 8 c4 Nb6 9 Be3 Nc6 10 a3 then 10 ... h6! is very strong, as taking on h6 allows the black queen to come to h4 with tempo, C.Steinle-N.Kirov, Dortmund 1988.

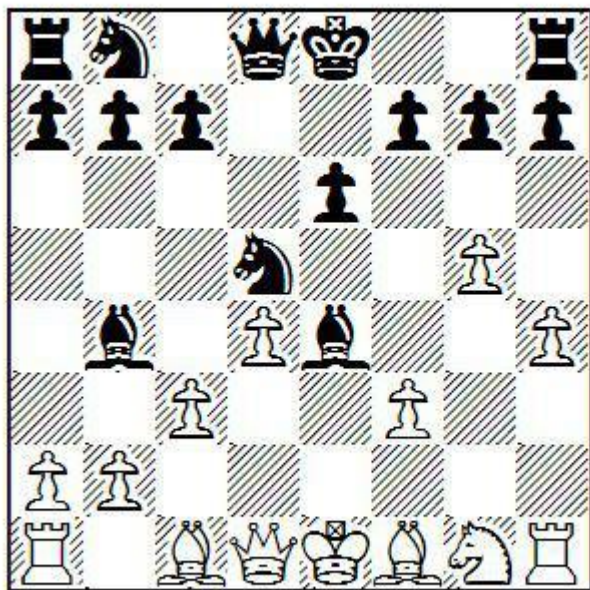
8 ... Bb4+?!

Objectively, 8 ... Nc6! may have been strongest, while Black had several other attractive choices at this junction, such as 8 ... Be7 and 8 ... h6. On the other hand, the text is certainly the most exciting!

9 c3

Taking up the challenge. The tame 9 Kf2 Be7 10 h5 Bf5 would have left White with only a slight disadvantage.

9 ... Bxe4!



Black sacrifices a piece to bust open the white position. Note that every white piece still sits on their respective starting squares!

10 fxe4 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Bxc3+ 12 Bd2 Qxd4 13 Bxc3 Qxc3+

The greedy 13 ... Qxe4+? 14 Qe2 Qxh1 15 Nf3! is winning for White.

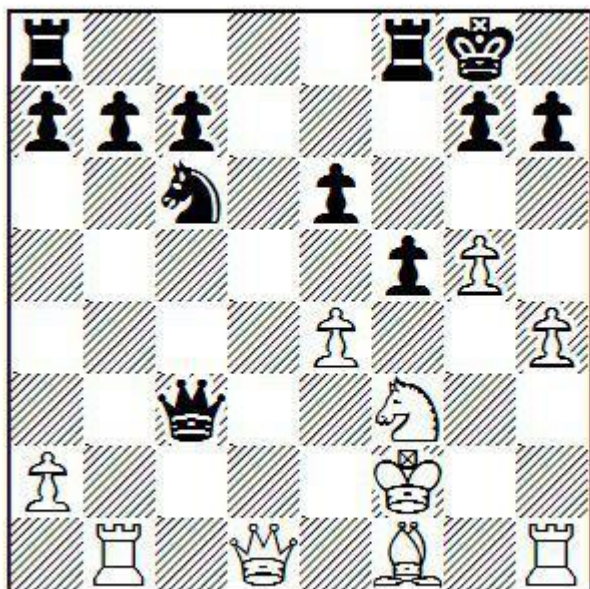
14 Kf2 Nc6

In addition to three pawns, Black has plenty of activity in exchange for the piece. Nonetheless, with the help of engine analysis, we can say that White's position is now perfectly acceptable, and that the sacrifice was both unsound and unnecessary. As we saw, Black had several good alternatives on moves seven and eight that would have led to a definite advantage.

15 Nf3 0-0 16 Rb1?

In fact 16 Rc1! would have led to an advantage for White.

16 ... f5!



Seizing the chance to open lines against the white king. Suddenly, Black takes over the initiative again.

17 Qd3

Instead, 17 gxf6? Rxf6 18 Rh3 Nd4 is quite unpalatable for White; but 17 exf5 looks a better way to allow the opening of the f-file, when 17 ... Qc5+! 18 Kg3 Qxf5 19 Bh3 Qf4+ 20 Kg2 Nd4! 21 Rf1 Rad8 maintains Black's initiative.

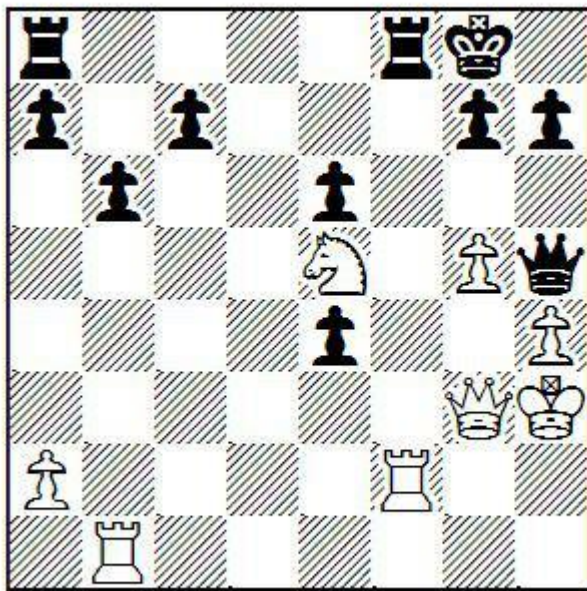
17 ... Qc5+ 18 Kg2 Ne5! 19 Nxe5 fxe4!?

Temporarily sacrificing a second piece, after which the game quickly fizzles towards a draw. 19 ... Qxe5!? 20 Rxb7 Rad8 21 Qe3 Rd4! was worthy of consideration. Black's compensation is sufficient for equality, but probably no more than that.

20 Qg3 Qc2+ 21 Be2! Qxe2+ 22 Kh3 b6?!

22 ... Rf5 looks more logical, and then 23 Rh2 (23 Rxb7 Rxe5 24 Qxe5 Qf3+ is perpetual check) 23 ... Qa6 24 Re1 Raf8 with a complicated position; I suspect a draw is the most likely result.

23 Rh2 Qh5 24 Rf2 ½-½



A strange position for a draw to be agreed, particularly for a correspondence game, as at this point modern engines claim that White is beginning to get on top. However, White's reduced number of pawns means that, even if the endgame can be consolidated, it is unlikely that she will have enough material left to bring home the full point. Moreover, in the short term, White's exposed king is still a telling factor. Overall, a draw is probably a fair result of Black's ambitious sacrifice; theoretically, it is clear that the opening was a complete success for Black. Moral of the story: the BDG is not to be feared!

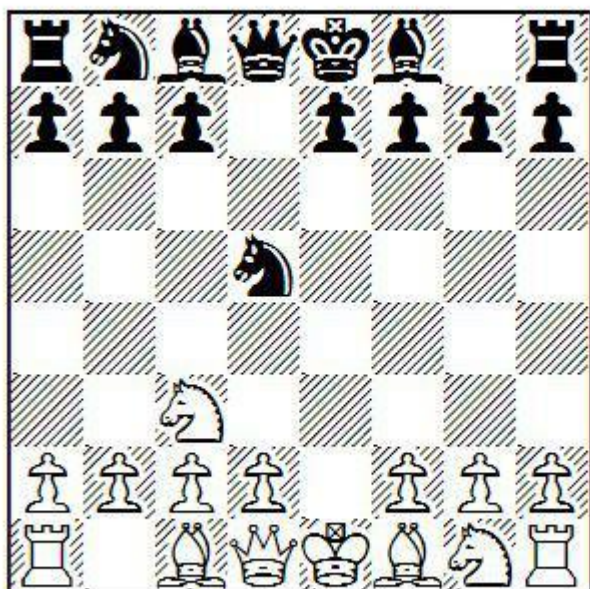
Theory: 3 Nc3

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nc3

White decides to steer the game clear of the wild tactics that characterize our repertoire. Apart from that, the text is not at all threatening, leading to a harmless variation of Alekhine's Defence. Having already equalized, Black can claim to have successfully won the opening battle. Still, you will face 3 Nc3 roughly one time in ten after 2 ... Nf6, so it is definitely worth spending the time to understand the positions that follow.

3 ... Nxd5

Black regains her pawn and occupies the centre, where the knight will remain unless it is captured or asked to move. In general, ... Nxc3 is ill-advised in this variation; Black usually meets Bc4 with ... Nb6, and otherwise is happy to wait until White breaks the tension with Nxd5. If Black recaptures on d5 with the queen, one important difference to note between this and other variations with ... Qxd5 is that Black rarely goes for a kingside attack. The reason is that the exchange of knights significantly reduces Black's offensive artillery. On the other hand, one fewer set of minor pieces eases the cramps in her position, so she can normally achieve easy equality by castling kingside, completing her development and playing in the centre.



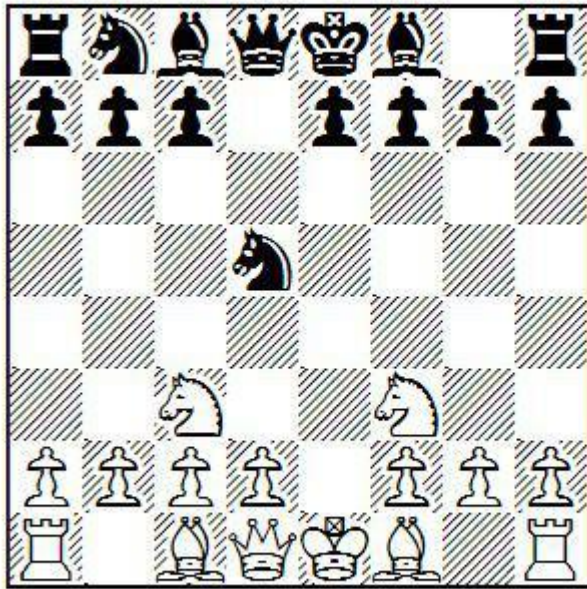
From the diagram, White can lead the play in three directions:

A: 4 Nf3

B: 4 Nxd5

C: 4 Bc4 (the best and most popular move)

A: 4 Nf3



White continues unambitiously. When faced with this sort of play, I usually try to deploy my pieces as actively as possible, grab the space on offer and look to secure every positional advantage available. White wants an easy route to equality; we're not going to provide it. Again, this is one of the lines that is so woefully unambitious, you almost needn't worry about it at all, but I will show you the best ways to put the maximum pressure on your opponents right out of the opening.

4 ... Bg4

Black has a number of decent alternatives, such as 4 ... Bf5 and 4 ... g6, but we will continue our strategy of preferring maximum activity, all else being equal.

5 d4

White has several other options:

a) 5 Nxd5 Qxd5 transposes to line B1 below.

b) 5 h3 Bh5 should also soon transpose to other lines.

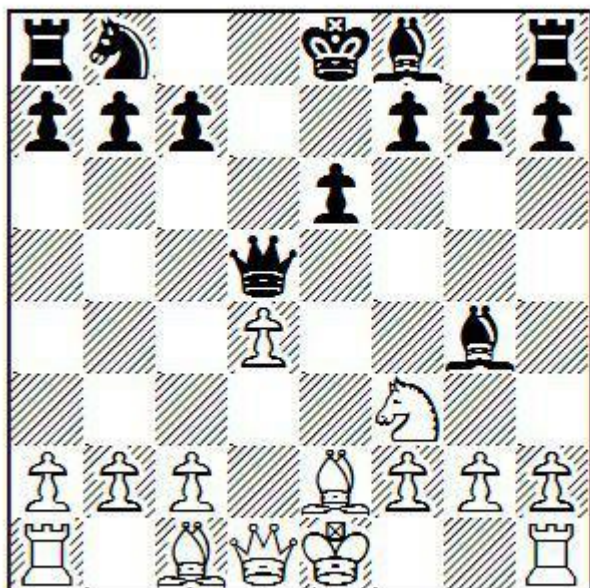
c) 5 Bc4 e6 6 d4 Be7 and Black has equalized comfortably, Re.Jensen-Cu.Hansen, Ribe 1978.

d) 5 Be2 can be met by either 5 ... e6 or 5 ... Nf4!? and Black faces no difficulties. For example, 5 ... e6 6 h3 Bh5 7 d4 Be7 (7 ... Bb4 8 Bd2 Nc6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Nxd5 exd5 is completely level) 8 0-0 0-0 9 Re1 Nc6 10 Ne4 Qd7 11 c3 Rad8 12 Ng3 Bg6 13 Bd3 Bxd3 14 Qxd3 Rfe8 15 Bd2 f6 with equal chances, B.Vandermeulen-J.Wansink, correspondence 2012.

5 ... e6 6 Nxd5

After 6 Be2 Be7 or 6 ... Bb4, play is similar to 5 Be2 above.

6 ... Qxd5 7 Be2

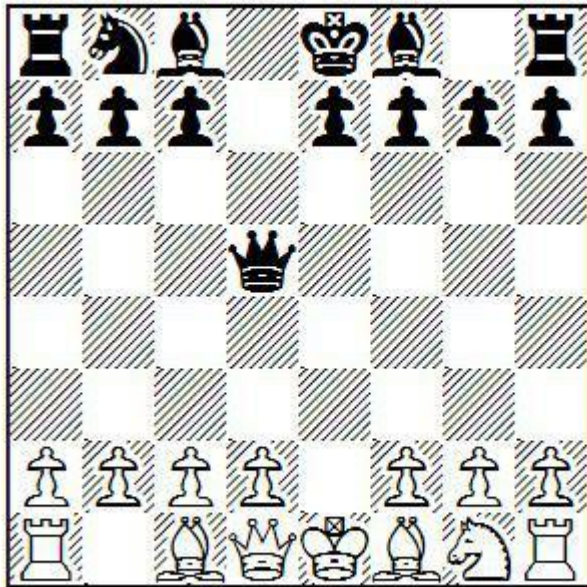


An instructive moment for your understanding of many of the lines in which White declines our gambit and allows ... Qxd5. You might feel that 7 ... Nc6 8 h3 Bh5 9 0-0 0-0-0 looks tempting here, but without the king's knight and access to h5 for the queen, Black's attacking chances are severely dented. With knights on f6 and b1 as well, ... Be7 is clearly too passive; Black would prefer ... Nc6, ... 0-0-0, and launching a quick offensive on the white king. However, the exchanged steeds in the current position mean that Black has enough room to achieve easy equality with more prosaic play:

7 ... Be7! 8 0-0 0-0 9 h3

La.Szabo-P.Keres, Tallinn 1969, and here 9 ... Bf5! is best; for example, 10 c4 Qd6 11 Be3 Rd8 12 Bd3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 c5 with equality.

B: 4 Nxd5 Qxd5



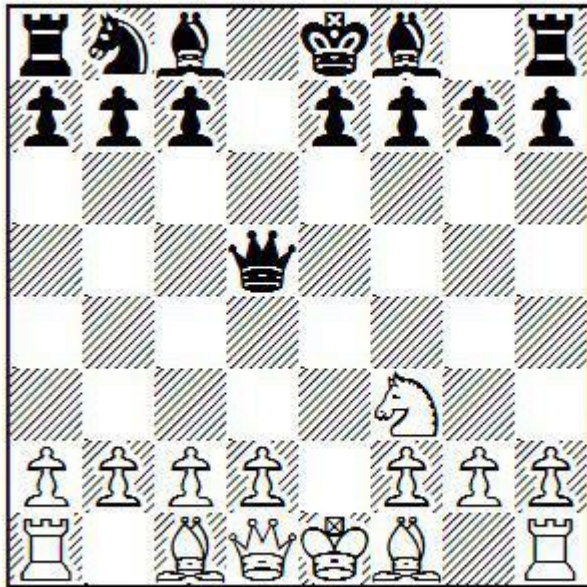
It surprises me how often this line, whereby White immediately cedes the centre, occurs in practice. You can skip this section if you like, content in the knowledge that Black is at least equal, but we shall look at a few variations for completeness:

B1: 5 Nf3 (the most popular)

B2: 5 d4 (which often transposes to B1)

B3: 5 Qf3

B1: 5 Nf3



5 ... Bg4

Alternatively, 5 ... e5!? is interesting: 6 d4 Nc6 7 Be3 (7 dxe5?! Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Bg4 9 Be2 0-0-0+ is very good for Black, Ra.Lau-I.Rausis, Untergrombach 1995) 7 ... Bf5! (a promising novelty) 8 dxe5 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 0-0-0+ 10 Kc1 Nb4 11 Ne1 Kb8 and Black has an active position with sufficient compensation for the pawn.

6 Be2 Nc6 7 0-0 0-0-0

Black reveals her ambitions by castling in the most active manner. She will seek to claim the centre with lively development, hoping to take over the initiative. The position remains balanced, but it is up to White to prove equality. Play may continue:

8 h3

Other moves:

a) 8 d4!? transposes to line B2.

b) 8 c3?! is too slow: 8 ... e5! 9 Qa4? (9 d4 is White's best option, when 9 ... exd4 10 cxd4 Bd6 11 Be3 f5! gives Black the edge) 9 ... e4! and Black won a nice miniature in L.Garcia Mengual-D.Campora, Coria del Rio 2006: 10 Bc4 Qh5 11 Ne1 Bd6 12 g3 Ne5 13 Qxa7 Nxc4 14 Qa8+ Kd7 15 Qa4+ b5 0-1.

c) 8 d3 is solid, but passive: 8 ... e5 9 Be3 f5 10 Bg5 Re8 11 c4 Qe6 was slightly more promising for Black in *Godswill* (2114)-

D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

d) 8 c4?! is a common mistake in these positions. The thrust is too committal, leaving White with a permanent weakness in the form of the backward d-pawn and, perhaps more importantly, cedes control over the critical d4-square. Then 8 ... Qd6 9 h3 Bf5 is much better for Black, so White lashed out with 9 b4!? in *jurex1* (2030)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013, when 9 ... e6! 10 c5 Qd5 leads to a complicated and exciting game with chances for both sides.

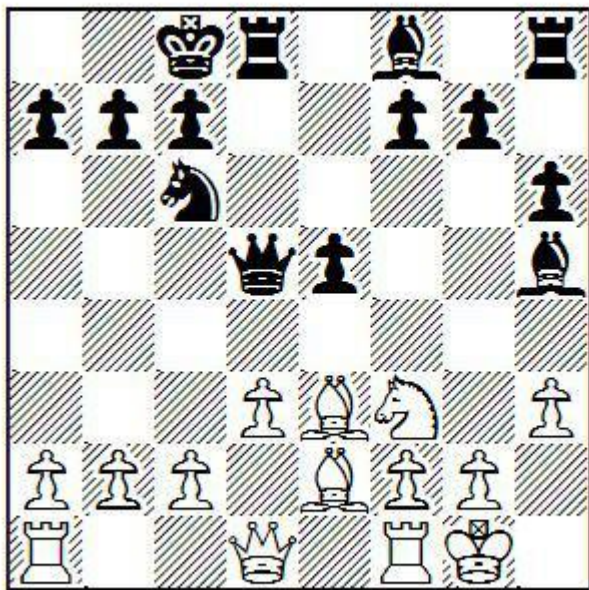
8 ... Bh5

The routine retreat, though 8 ... Bf5 9 d3 e5 is marginally better for Black.

9 d3 e5 10 Be3

Instead, 10 Ng5?! Bxe2 11 Qxe2 Nd4 12 Qd1 h6! is already good for Black, Man.Kolozinskis-M.Zavaneli, Plunge 2009; while after 10 g4? Bg6 11 Nh4 Bc5 12 Bf3, D.Nguyen-T.Nguyen, Ho Chi Minh City 2012, simply 12 ... Qd6! gives Black a clear advantage.

10 ... h6

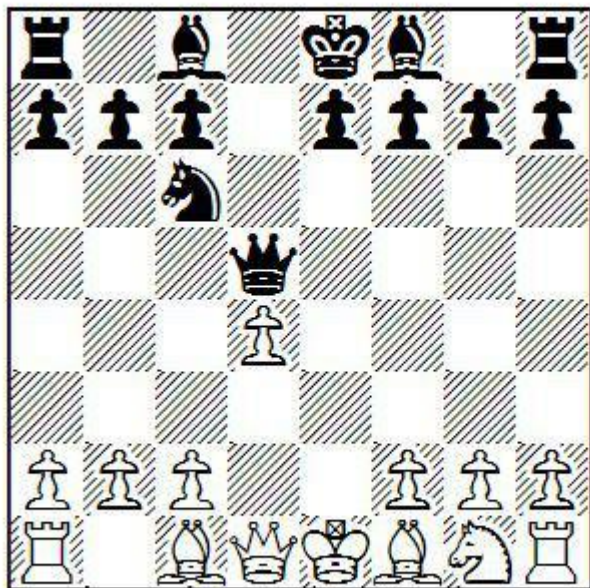


W

With chances for both sides, though Black's attack gets off the mark a bit faster on account of the target on h3. One game continued 11 Nd2?! Bxe2 12 Qxe2 f5 13 f4 exf4 14 Bxf4 Bc5+ 15 Kh1 g5 with a powerful attack in *kifa13* (2200)-D.Smerdon, Internet

2013.

B2: 5 d4 Nc6



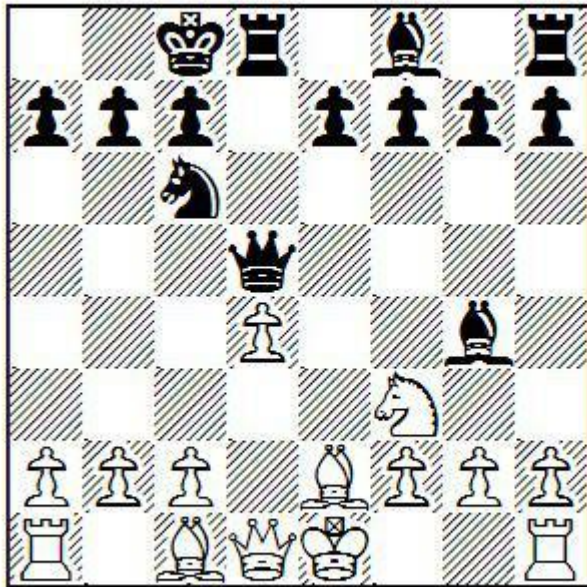
6 Nf3

Instead:

a) 6 c3?! e5 is already better for Black.

b) 6 Be3 is also quite common and should also be met by 6 ... e5. Then 7 dxe5 (7 Nf3 transposes to 5 ... e5!? in the notes to line B1 above) 7 ... Qxe5 8 Qe2 (or 8 c3 Bc5! 9 Nf3 Qe7 10 Qe2 0-0 and Black is much better, P.Doza-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2000) 8 ... Be6 is good for Black, while 9 Qb5?? Bb4+! won quickly in P.Ofstad-H.Westerinen, Fagernes 2011.

6 ... Bg4 7 Be2 0-0-0



This position has been reached several times before, on each occasion with White choosing something uninspired and Black achieving a slight opening advantage. However, White has at her disposal an interesting gambit that I have rehabilitated with the help of my trusty engine:

8 0-0!?

The best move. The alternatives are extremely dangerous for White:

a) 8 c4?! hands the initiative over to Black after 8 ... Qe4 9 Be3 e5 10 d5 Bxf3 11 gxf3, M.Kooshani-E.Titova Boric, Cappelle la Grande 2008, and now 11 ... Qh4! is a strong novelty, after which Black's advantage is sizeable – the knight will jump into d4, leaving White completely unable to hold up her dark-squared weaknesses.

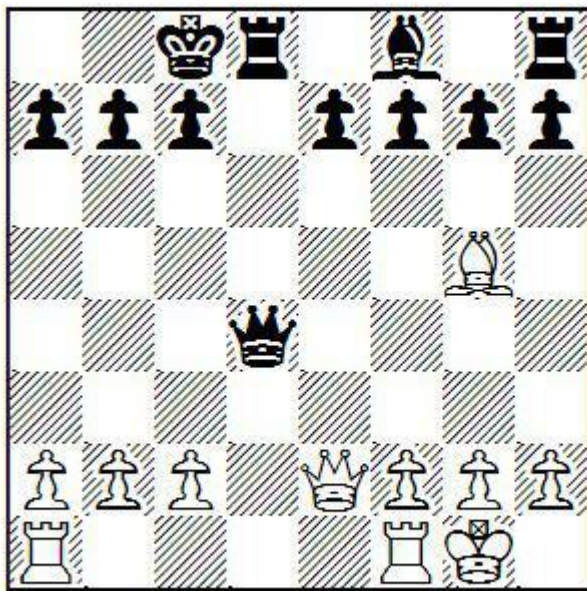
b) 8 Be3?! e5! leaves Black well on top: 9 0-0 (9 c4? Qa5+ 10 Bd2 Bb4 11 d5 e4! and 9 dxe5? Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Qa5+ 11 Bd2 Qxe5+ both win immediately) 9 ... exd4 10 Nxd4 Bxe2 11 Nxe2 Qc4! with a clear advantage, M.Mostertman-A.Wohl, Dieren 2009.

c) 8 c3?! e5 9 dxe5? (even 9 0-0 is good for Black – see 8 c3?! e5 9 d4 in the notes to line B1) 9 ... Qe4! and Black has a decisive advantage already, T.Struch-C.Scheerer, Canarias en Red, Internet (blitz) 2004.

8 ... Bxf3

Declining the pawn with 8 ... e5 looks healthy, but White can continue in a barbaric fashion: 9 c4! Qe4 10 d5! Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Qxc4 and now the powerful novelty 12 Bg5! gives White the better game; for example, 12 ... f6 13 Rc1 Qa6 14 Qc2 fxe5 15 dxc6 b6 16 Qf5+ Kb8 17 Qxe5 with a clear advantage.

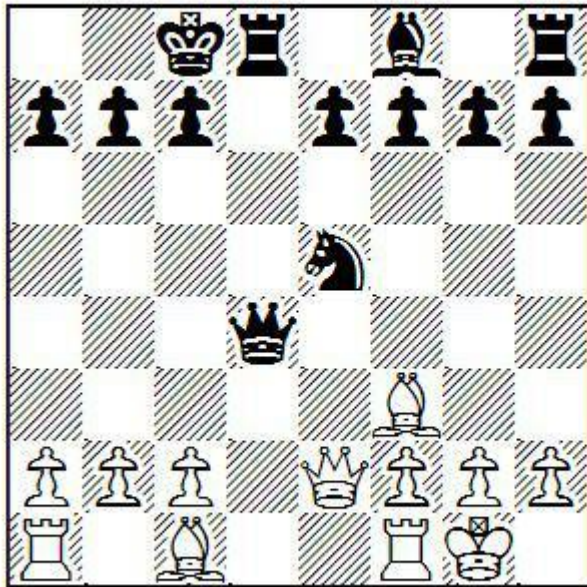
Instead, 8 ... Nxd4 leads to a draw after some tactical acrobatics: 9 Nxd4 Bxe2 10 Qxe2 Qxd4 11 Bg5! (this move again! – White ties the black e-pawn down for one valuable tempo)



11 ... Qc5 12 Qg4+ Rd7 13 Rad1 e6 14 Rxd7 Kxd7 15 Be3 Qe5 16 Rd1+ Bd6 17 Bf4 Qxb2 18 Bxd6 cxd6 19 Qf4 Kc8 20 Qxf7 Qf6 21 Qxf6 gxf6 22 Rxd6 Rd8 with a drawn king and pawn endgame.

You may prefer, as the engines do, to hang onto the pawn and play Black's position after 11 ... Qd5 12 h4! Qc6 13 Rfd1 Re8, although personally I don't often enjoy this sort of 'grab and hold' approach.

9 Bxf3 Qxd4 10 Qe2 Ne5!



Principled.

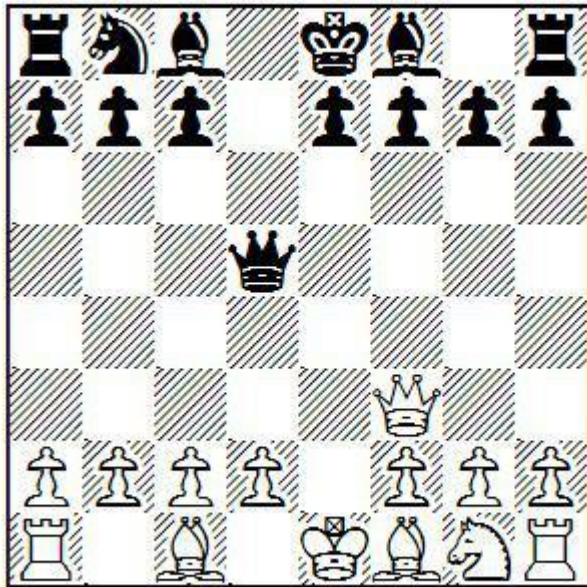
11 Be4

Here 11 Bg5?! Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Qd5! demonstrates the key difference in the white queen's placement between this and the 8 ... Nxd4 line above. After 13 Qg4+ Rd7 14 Rad1 h5!, Black hangs on to the extra pawn and with it the advantage.

11 ... g6 12 Bg5 Bg7 13 Rad1 Qc4 14 Qe3 Kb8

Having successfully completed her development, Black is slightly better and can look to the future with confidence – particularly on the queenside.

B3: 5 Qf3



White continues to try and bore her opponent into submission. Of course, the position is completely equal, so you should choose your reply to suit whatever sort of game you wish to play.

5 ... Be6!?

My preferred choice. Black acquiesces to an endgame, but on her terms. Instead:

a) 5 ... c6 leads to a different endgame with a Carlsbad structure, if that is your cup of tea: 6 Qxd5 cxd5 7 d4 Nc6 8 c3 Bf5 9 Bf4 e6 10 Nf3 Be7 11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 Bxe5 f6 13 Bg3 Kf7 is equal, *Zebrahead* (2109)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

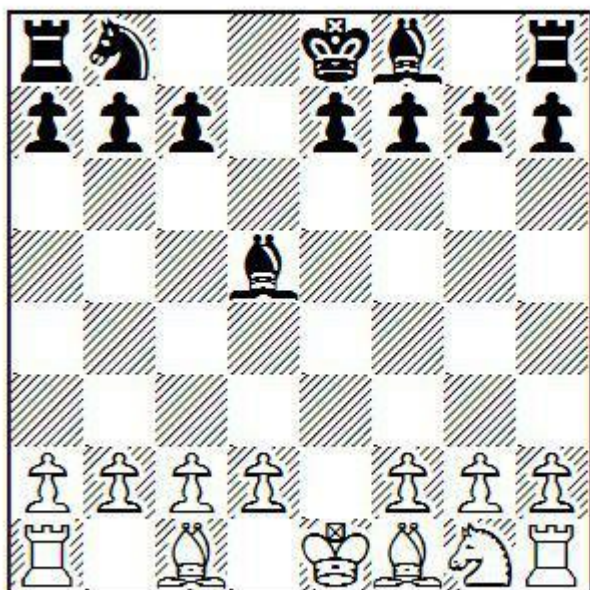
b) 5 ... Qc5 is the best way to keep the queens on the board and is also completely fine. Black will take over the centre with a quick ... e7-e5.

6 Qxd5

6 c3 Nc6 7 d4 0-0-0 is more comfortable for Black, very much so after 8 Qxd5?! Bxd5 9 Be3 e5! with a clear advantage that spelled a quick collapse in one online game: 10 dxe5 Nxe5 11 0-0-0 Bxa2 12 Bxa7 Rxd1+ 13 Kxd1 Bb3+ 14 Kc1 b6, winning in *Coldplay* (1951)-Grossen (2658), Internet (blitz) 2003.

6 ... Bxd5

Players on the black side might feel a sense of disappointment at White's complete avoidance of any of the wild, tactical, 'fun' lines of our repertoire. I must confess that there was once a time when I felt the same way, but not anymore. In my experience, White's extremely unambitious play should serve as a sign of a lack of confidence, and this conservatism in the opening usually flows through to all stages of the game. With deliberate, sensible play, Black can quickly build up a small advantage through maintained pressure that often culminates in a full success. In fact, Black is already marginally better, thanks to her more active bishop. The statistics support this argument: Black scores almost 90% from the diagram. For example:



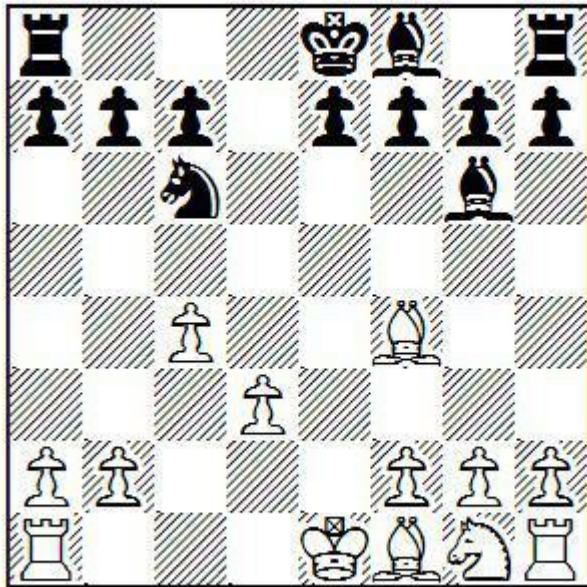
7 c4?!

This very common move should be met by the active reply ...

7 ... Be4! 8 d3

8 d4 Nc6 9 Be3 Nb4! is very uncomfortable.

8 ... Bg6 9 Bf4 Nc6!



A lovely move. Despite the reduced material, Black's energetic attitude to development has facilitated this attractive sacrifice. Black is already clearly better.

10 Bxc7 e5 11 f4 Bb4+ 12 Kd1 e4!

Black continues to deny White a moment's respite. The position is indefensible. Notice over the next few moves that White is never given a chance to bring the rest of the army out from their starting squares, while the black masses begin to swarm.

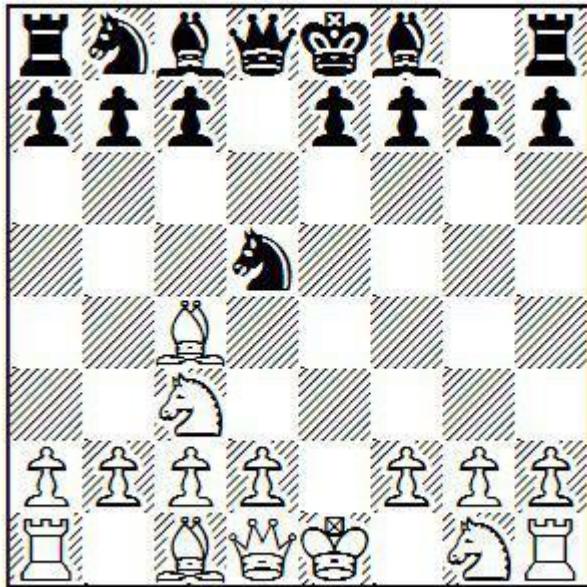
13 a3 Bc5 14 Kc2 Nd4+ 15 Kc3 Ne6 16 Be5 f6 17 g4??

17 f5 holds on, though 17 ... Bxf5 18 dxe4 Bg6 19 Bg3 Bd4+ will soon spell the end.

17 ... fxe5 18 f5 Bd4+ 19 Kd2 Nc5!

Black won shortly, A.Haapaniemi-H.Westerinen, Jyvaskyla 1995.

C: 4 Bc4

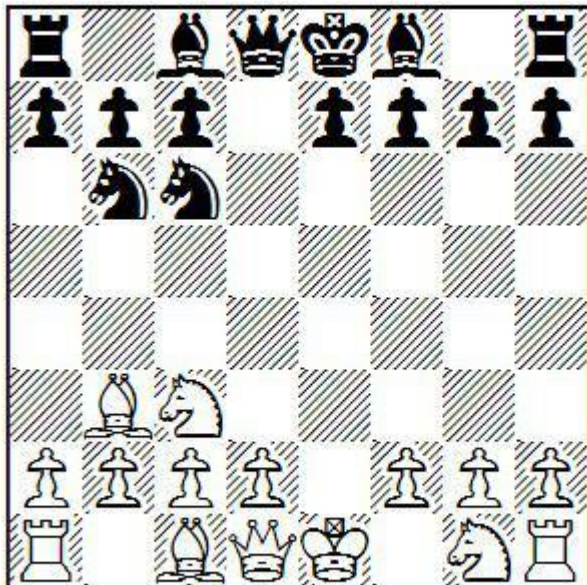


The main line. White hopes for 4 ... Nxc3?!, after which 5 Qf3! gives her a promising position.

4 ... Nb6

4 ... c6!? is an acceptable alternative, but we'll focus on Black's most active response.

5 Bb3 Nc6



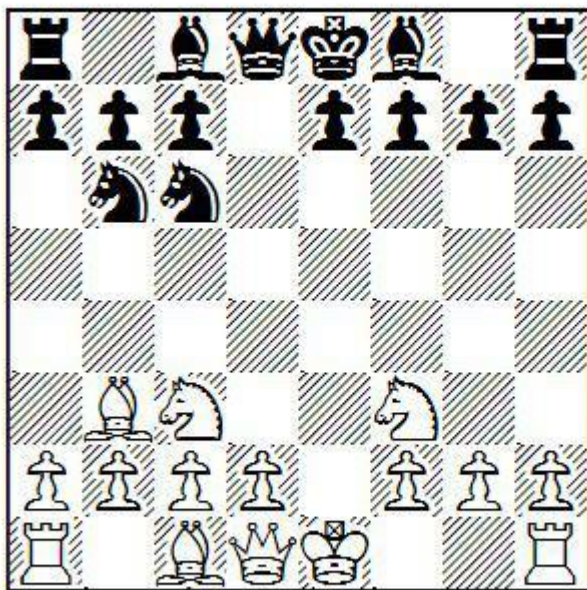
Now White has a choice:

C1: 6 Nf3 (the main line)

C2: 6 Qf3!?

You'll occasionally also come across the passive 6 Nge2!?. After the natural 6 ... Bf5 7 0-0 e6 8 d3 Bd6 9 Be3 0-0, Black's position is already more comfortable, Kiy.Lee-D.Smerdon, Beijing (team rapid) 2008.

C1: 6 Nf3



6 ... Bf5 7 d4

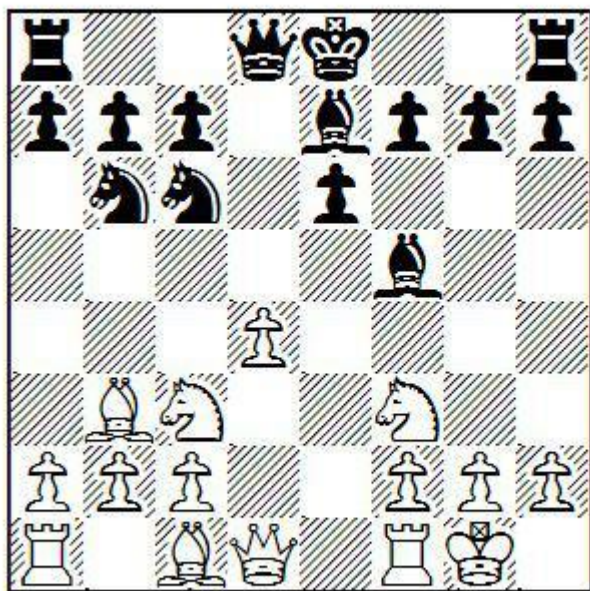
7 0-0 e6 8 d4 is an equally popular move-order.

7 ... e6 8 0-0

8 Bf4 was played against Alekhine in one of the very first games to feature this variation. However, White should prefer to see where Black's f8-bishop is heading before committing her own dark-squared bishop. The early sortie gives Black the option of easing her position with an exchange on d6; i.e. 8 ... Bd6! 9 Qd2 0-0 10 0-0 Bg4! (a very typical theme in this variation) 11 Bxd6 Qxd6 12 Ne4 Qd8! (keeping the pressure on d4 so that White doesn't have the

time to shore up her kingside) 13 c3 Bxf3 14 gxf3, P.Milner Barry-A.Alekhine, Hastings 1933/34, and now Black could have gained a slight advantage with 14 ... Ne7!, emphasizing White's structural weaknesses.

8 ... Be7



It is necessary to develop the bishop to this somewhat passive square for the time being, since 8 ... Bd6?! 9 d5! will lead to discomfort on the e-file.

We have reached the key tabiya for 3 Nc3, and you will certainly see this position many times in your Scandinavian career, so let's take stock. The position is objectively level but with plenty of play for both sides, so overall Black should be very happy with the result of the opening. As opposed to the pawn on e6, White's central pawn on d4 gives her a little more space but is also a target for the black pieces. Black can increase the pressure with ... Bg4 and putting a rook on the d-file, though she should be careful of playing ... Bd6 if White can respond with Ne4.

From White's perspective, she would like to throw in a prophylactic h2-h3 to stop the pin on the Nf3. However, it is a little time-consuming and Black can usually respond with a quick ... Bf6 and put pressure on the centre. White's mercurial bishop on b3 can

prove to be the hero or the villain, depending on whether or not it can eventually see open space on the a2-g8 diagonal. Black should keep an eye out for a d4-d5 push, usually by playing either ... Nc6-a5xb3, or by flicking in ... a7-a5 and, after White's a2-a4, plonking a knight on b4 to control d5. Occasionally Black decides simply to occupy the square with the other knight via ... Nb6-d5, though this manoeuvre is sometimes susceptible to getting hit with a potential c2-c4.

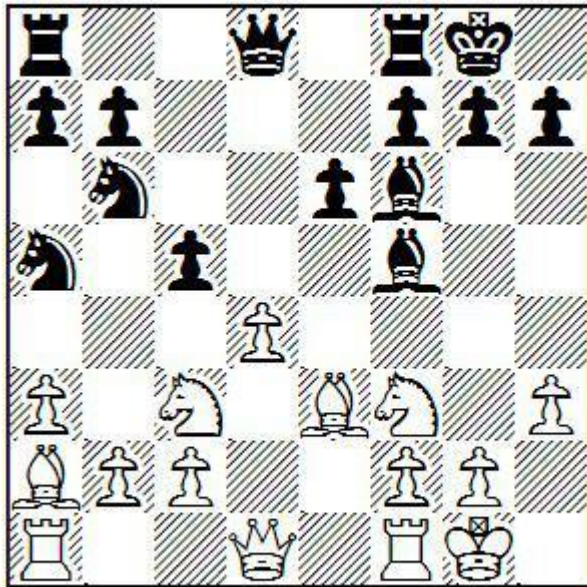
That is a lot to take in on one go, but note that memorizing lines from this point is *not* important. It is far more useful to get a feel for the ideas and themes in the position, and the best way to do that is to see how strong players on the black side have handled things. Let's have a look at a few sample variations, which can often transpose into each other.

C11: 9 Bf4

C12: 9 Re1

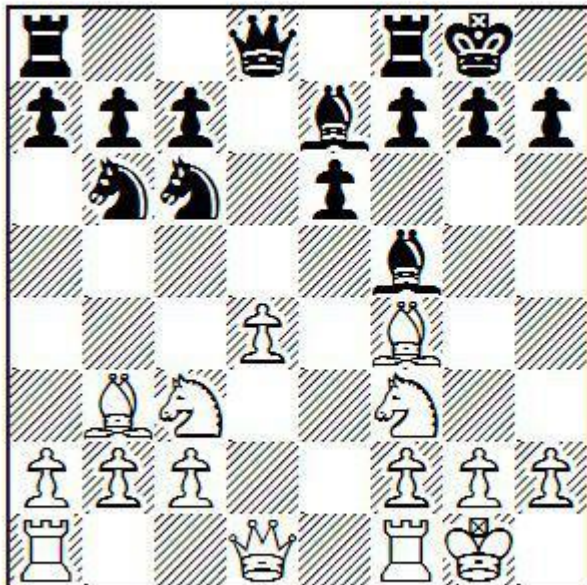
C13: 9 d5

Instead, 9 h3 0-0 10 a3?! (one prophylactic pawn move too many, though other moves offer White nothing either) 10 ... Bf6 11 Be3 Na5 12 Ba2 c5! was an interesting pawn sacrifice to mix things up, seen in J.Horner-D.Smerdon, Isle of Man 2007.



After 13 dxc5 Nbc4 14 Qc1 Bxc3! 15 bxc3, rather than 15 ... Qc7?, I should have opted to eliminate the bishop pair and play for structural compensation with 15 ... Nxe3! 16 Qxe3 Qc7, when Black has a good position.

C11: 9 Bf4 0-0



10 d5

Instead, 10 Re1 transposes to line C12, while 10 h3 is too slow and allows Black to exert immediate pressure on d4 with 10 ... Bf6!. For example, 11 Nb5 (after 11 d5 exd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bxd5 Bxb2 14 Rb1 Qf6!, it is not an easy task for White to recover the pawn) 11 ... Rc8 12 c3 a6 13 Na3 Be4!? 14 Nc4 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Na5 16 Bd3 Bxd3 17 Qxd3 c5! was good for Black in Gi.Nguyen-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2004.

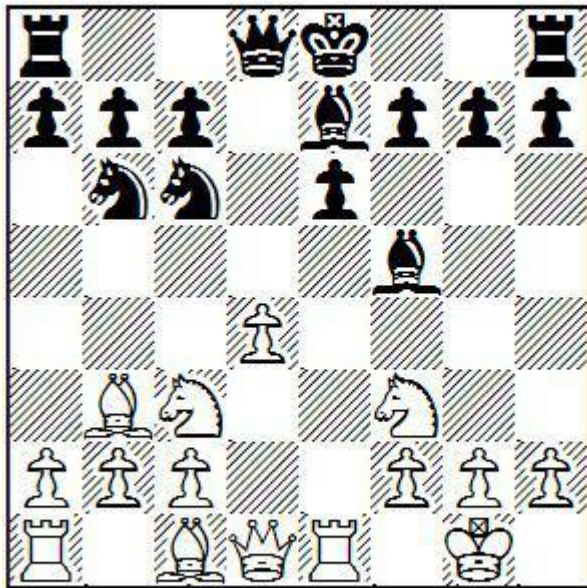
10 ... exd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Qxd5

Or 12 Bxd5 Bxc2 13 Qxc2 Qxd5 with a very slight edge to Black.

12 ... Qxd5 13 Bxd5

With almost complete symmetry in the ending, the game will most likely end in a draw. For instance, after 13 ... Nb4 14 Bxb7 Rab8 15 Nd4 Bxc2 16 Nxc2 Nxc2 17 Rac1 Nd4 18 Bf3 Nxf3+ 19 gxf3 Bd6, both sides could probably call it a day.

C12: 9 Re1



9 ... 0-0

Here 9 ... Na5!? is an interesting way to prevent White from liquidating the centre with 10 d5?!, on account of 10 ... Nxb3 11 axb3 Nxd5 12 Nxd5 Qxd5 13 Qxd5 exd5 14 Nd4 Be4! and, after a

subsequent ... Kd7, Black can start the long conversion of the extra pawn, Al.Ivanov-L.Alburt, Ashkhabad 1978. Instead, 10 Ne4 0-0 11 Ng3 Nxb3 12 axb3 Bg6 13 Ne5 is better, and White is a little more comfortable after eliminating the bishop pair, though the position is still objectively level.

After 9 ... 0-0, White should again swap down to an equal endgame with 10 d5. However, the somewhat careless ...

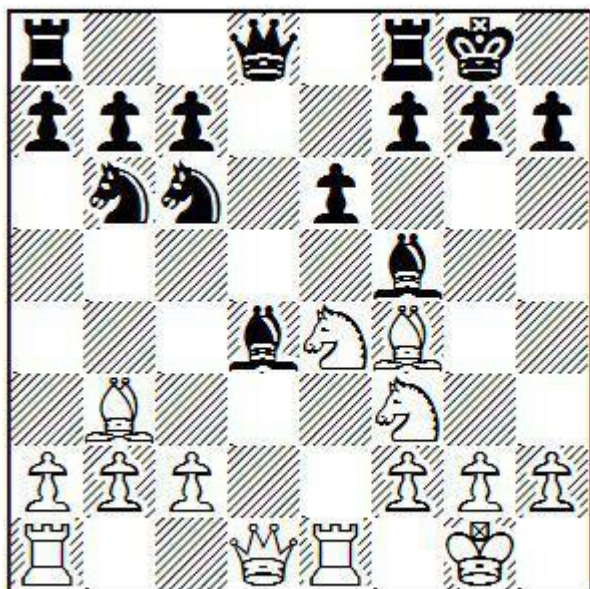
10 Bf4?!

... is very common, when ...

10 ... Bf6!

... is awkward to meet. For example:

11 Ne4 Bxd4



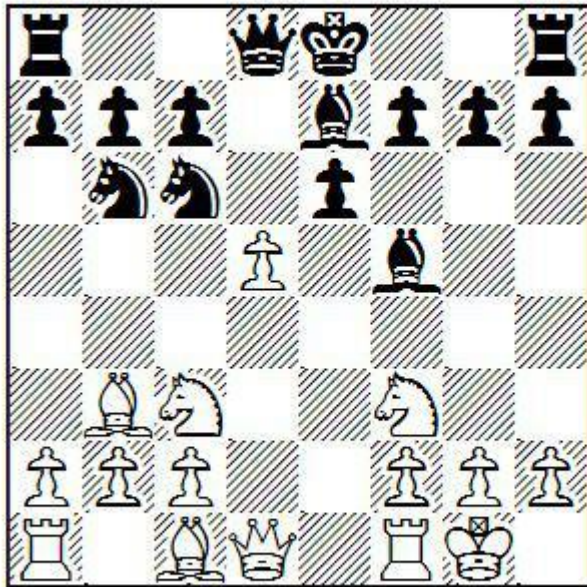
12 Nxd4

12 c3 Bxe4 13 Rxe4 Bf6 14 Qxd8 Bxd8 is better, when White has some compensation for the pawn, though I would prefer Black.

12 ... Qxd4 13 Qxd4 Nxd4 14 Bxc7 Rfc8 15 Bxb6 axb6 16 Nd6 Rxc2!

And Black had neatly won a pawn in Ge.Mann-A.Hauchard, Kecskemet 1991.

C13: 9 d5



White decides to force matters in the centre before Black can finish her development. The exchange of the two remaining central pawns snuffs a lot of life out of the position, and things will generally move quite quickly towards an equal endgame.

9 ... exd5 10 Nxd5 Nxd5 11 Qxd5

Or 11 Bxd5 0-0! (Black needn't fear the doubling of her pawns from an exchange on c6, as her bishop pair will provide ample positional compensation in the endgame) 12 c3 and now 12 ... Qd6! is the easiest way to achieve absolute equality. Instead, 12 ... Na5!? 13 a3 c6 14 Ba2 Qxd1 15 Rxd1 Be6 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 Bg5 Rxf3 18 Bxe7 Rf7 was a slightly more lively way to saunter towards a draw in M.Taimanov-V.Tseshkovsky, USSR Championship, Moscow 1976.

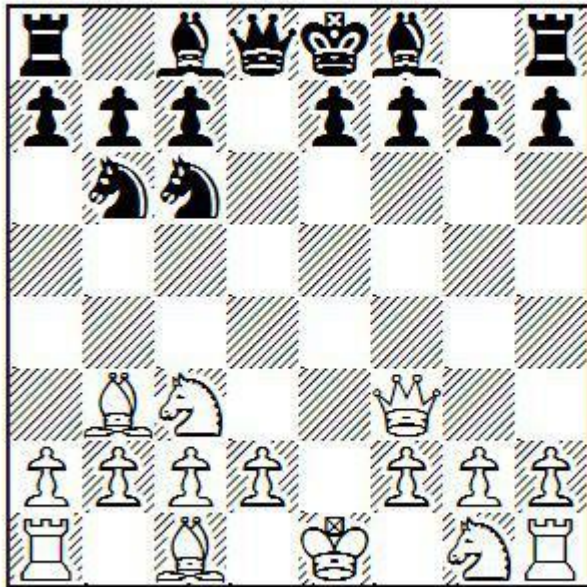
11 ... Qxd5 12 Bxd5 0-0-0! 13 Bxc6

13 Bxf7 Bxc2 gives Black a microscopic edge, so long as White prevents ... Bf6 with 14 Bg5!.

13 ... bxc6 14 Ne5 Rd5! 15 Nxc6 Bf6



•



Rare, but in my opinion this is White's most promising approach in this variation. White is prepared to risk prematurely developing her queen in order to force Black into an early ... e7-e6. With Black's bishop still at home on c8, this is something of a concession. On the other hand, White loses the option of pushing d2-d4, and consequently Black should still be able to reach a level game with fairly natural development. With White shifting her forces to the kingside, a common manoeuvre by Black is to transfer her own knights in that direction.

6 ... e6 7 Nge2

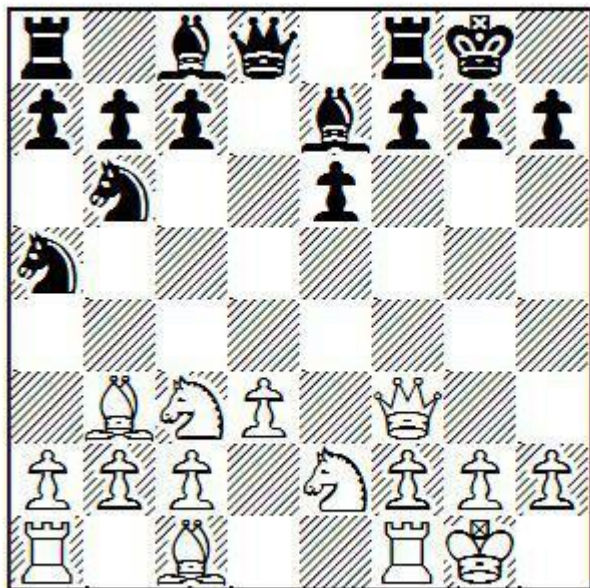
7 Qg3 Nd4! is not threatening. After 8 Nf3 Nf5 9 Qe5 Bd6 10 Qe2 0-0, White had nothing to show for her queen dance in L.Kotan-A.Grosar, Leipzig 2002.

7 ... Be7 8 d3 0-0 9 0-0

9 a3!? gives the b3-bishop a safe haven; indeed, after 9 ... Na5?! 10 Ba2 c5 11 Ne4 Nc6 12 0-0 Kh8 13 Qh5!, White had built up a dangerous position in Wang Chen-Bu Xiangzhi, Chinese Team Championship 2012. Instead, Black should immediately redeploy her knights to the defence of the kingside. This may seem counterintuitive, but Black will win some tempi in the process by

hitting the white queen: 9 ... Ne5! 10 Qh5 Ng6 11 0-0 Nd7! 12 Nf4 Nf6 13 Qe2 Bd7 14 d4 Bc6 with an equal game.

9 ... Na5



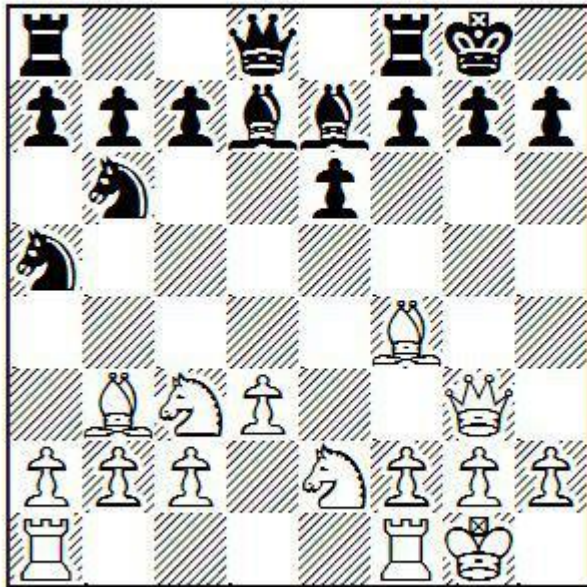
This has been the choice of most players (myself included), grabbing the bishop pair. However, I have come to the opinion that the plan of transferring the black knights to the kingside is at least as good, while leading to richer positions. The choice is yours.

After 9 ... Ne5!? 10 Qh5 Ng6, Black will bring her other steed across with ... Nd7-f6 and attempt to complete her development with ... Bd7-c6, as in the previous note, with a nice game.

10 Bf4

10 Ng3 Bd7 11 Nh5 Nxb3 12 axb3 Bc6 13 Qg3 g6 14 Bh6 Bd6 is equal after 15 Bf4 Nd5, while 15 f4? f5!! was a fantastic winning shot in G.Livshits-VI.Sergeev, Olomouc 2001. The knight on h5 is trapped and lost; for example, 16 Bxf8 Qxf8 17 Rae1 Re8 18 Ne2 Kh8 with ... g6xh5 to follow.

10 ... Bd7 11 Qg3



11 ... Bh4!

A novelty, after which Black guarantees herself an equal share of the chances.

Instead, 11 ... Rc8 12 Nd4 a6 13 Nf3 Bf6 14 Rab1 Nxb3 15 axb3 Nd5 16 Nxd5 exd5 17 Bg5 Bxg5 18 Qxg5 Qxg5 19 Nxg5 Rfe8 gave Black a pleasant endgame advantage in *MasterKia* (2229)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013. However, 12 Bh6! Bf6 13 Ne4 Bc6 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Bd2 would have offered White a slight but persistent edge.

12 Qe3

12 Bxc7 Bxg3 13 Bxd8 Bxh2+ 14 Kxh2 Rfxd8 is equal.

12 ... a6

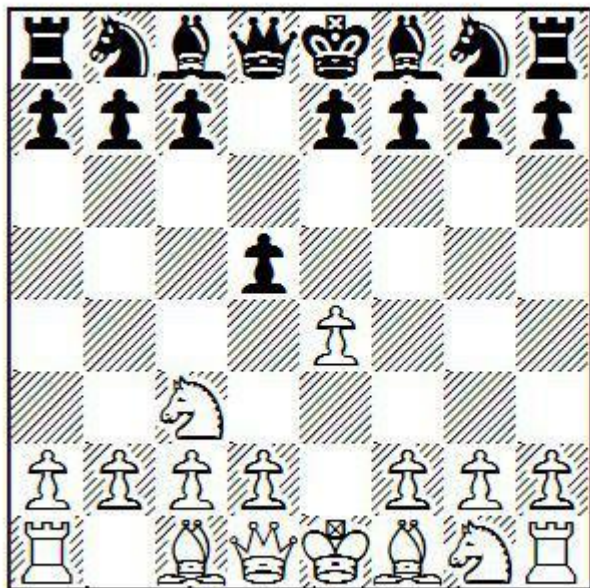
The position retains chances for both sides.

Theory: 2 Nc3

1 e4 d5 2 Nc3

2 Nc3 is yet another harmless sideline, but it is also the most popular of White's alternatives to 2 exd5. Consequently, it is worth paying some attention to my suggestions below, because you are likely to face this variation more often than you might expect, and a bit of effort can leave you well placed to push for an opening advantage.

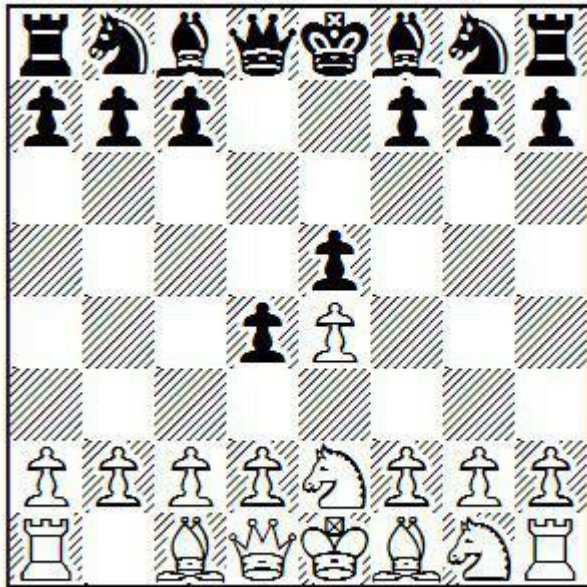
By the way, the diagram is often reached via Van Geet's opening: 1 Nc3 d5 2 e4.



2 ... d4!

Transpositional possibilities abound: 2 ... e6 leads to the French Defence, 2 ... c6 to the Caro-Kann, and 2 ... Nf6 to the Alekhine's Defence. Alternatively, Black has a choice between gaining space through the text move, and the more open 2 ... dxe4. The capture is more popular and usually leads to positions closely resembling the Caro-Kann where Black has saved a move by omitting ... c7-c6. This has often been suggested by authors in the past as an easy way to equalize – which is true, and may be more to your taste – but I prefer to pronounce loftier ambitions and immediately claim the centre. After the text, which I consider the strongest move, White will have a hard fight to reach equality.

3 Nce2 e5



A critical juncture for this variation. White is striving to reach some sort of reversed defence – such as the King’s Indian, Old Indian, or Nimzowitsch (1 e4 Nc6) – with an extra tempo. In an ideal world, she manages Ng3, Nf3, Bc4, d2-d3 and 0-0 with active play. Black, on the other hand, has ambitiously grabbed the extra space on offer and will enjoy a positional advantage if she can prevent White’s plan. In most of the lines I am recommending, two key themes emerge. Firstly, Black shouldn’t allow White’s light-squared bishop to enjoy too much freedom, instead aiming to restrict this piece as much as possible; ... Be6 is a typical move in this respect. Secondly, Black can often view the white knights on g3 and f3 as targets rather than threats, preferring to castle long and launch a pawn storm on the kingside. With accurate play, it is my belief that Black should enjoy the better chances.

From the diagram, White has explored three main options. In decreasing order of popularity, they are:

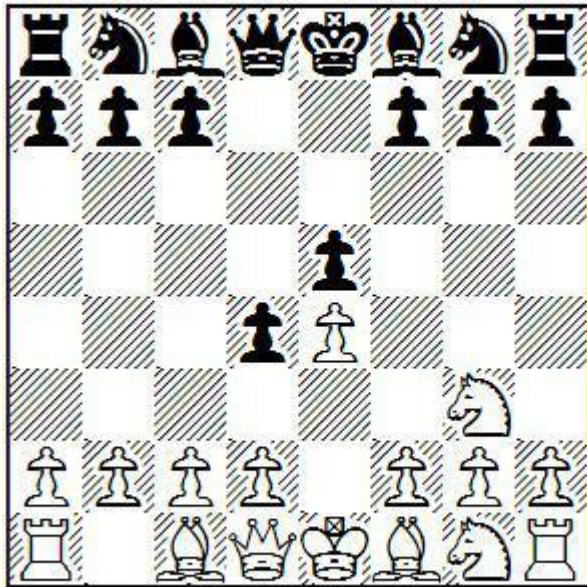
A: 4 Ng3

B: 4 Nf3

C: 4 d3

The immediate 4 f4?! is inaccurate, as White is underprepared for this early thrust: 4 ... exf4 5 Nxf4 Bd6 6 d3 Nf6 7 Nf3 0-0 8 Be2 Re8 9 0-0 c5! gives Black a healthy advantage after very natural moves.

A: 4 Ng3

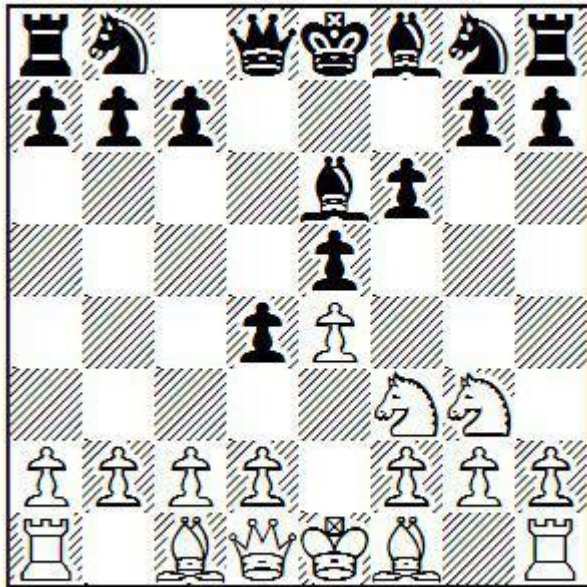


The third knight jump is probably best continuation, tried by several grandmasters as well as in many elite correspondence games. White reopens the way for her king's bishop to move to c4, which would really be an excellent location. Naturally, we won't allow it.

4 ... Be6! 5 Nf3

If 5 c3, then 5 ... a6! is a very nice move. On consecutive turns, Black cuts out access to the prime real estate for White's light-squared bishop. Black plans simply continuing her development, so White is forced to react quickly to prevent drifting into a worse position: 6 cxd4 exd4 7 f4 (or 7 d3 Nc6 8 Be2 Qd7 9 Bd2 0-0-0 10 f4 f6 with a slight advantage to Black, who plans ... Nh6-g4) 7 ... Nc6 8 d3 (8 f5!? is tempting, but gives up the crucial e5-square: 8 ... Bd7 9 Bc4 Ne5 10 d3 Nxc4 11 dxc4 Qe7! was good for Black in S.J.Henri-S.Dibley, correspondence 2008) 8 ... g6 9 Nf3 Qd7 10 Be2 h5! with a strong position for Black, as demonstrated in both S.J.Henri-L.Trembecki, correspondence 2009, and S.J.Henri-D.Scuderi, correspondence 2009.

5 ... f6!



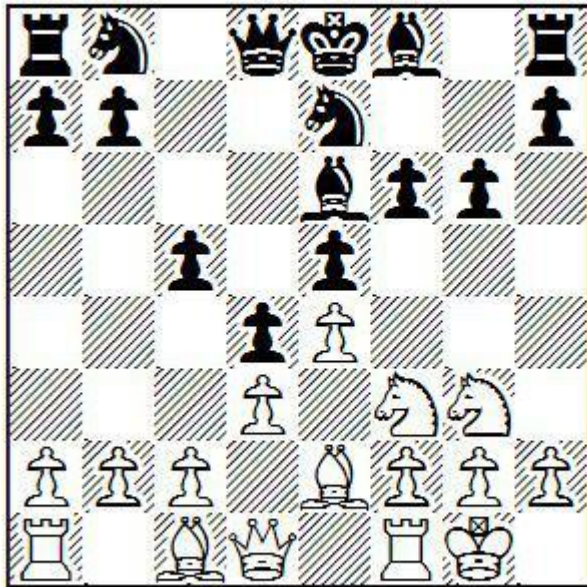
Popular and best. White now has to decide how to develop her light-squared bishop, and every option has its own disadvantages. There is no reason to allow White any respite with 5 ... Nc6 6 Bb5!.

6 b3

A natural attempt to swap off the problem-child, but it has a concrete flaw. On the hand hand, alternatives are no better.

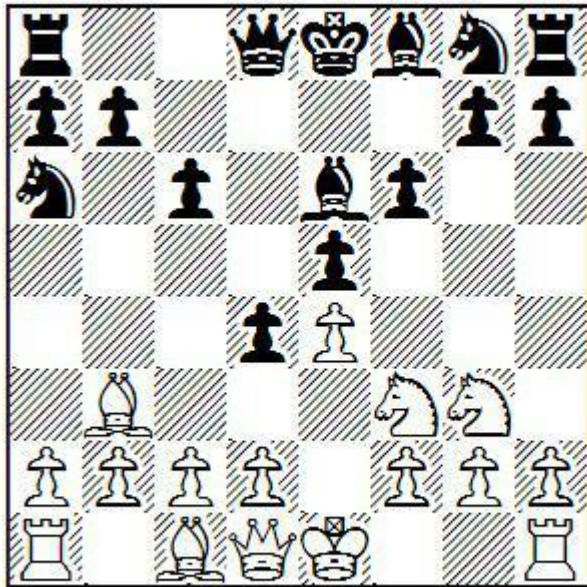
a) 6 d3?! gives up any hope of the f1-bishop finding green fields to roam, and the concession is significant. 6 ... Bd6 7 Be2 Ne7 8 0-0 Qd7 9 Nh4 Nbc6 10 c4 g6 11 f4 exf4 12 Bxf4 Bxf4 13 Rxf4 0-0 was clearly superior for Black, To.Bottema-L.Van Wely, New York Open 1996.

b) 6 Be2 Ne7 (6 ... Nh6 7 0-0 c5 is another possibility, as White's new lease of freedom for her light-squared bishop isn't enough to secure equality: 8 Bb5+ Nd7 9 Qe2 g6 10 Bc4 Qe7! and Black harbours deceptively aggressive intentions on the kingside; for example, 11 Bxe6 Qxe6 12 d3 Nf7 13 c4 Be7 14 Re1 h5 15 Nh4 Rg8 16 h3 0-0-0 saw the black pieces massing for a kingside offensive in O.Ekebjærg-J.Van Oosterom, correspondence 2002) 7 0-0 g6 8 d3 c5.



Now that White has permanently imprisoned her own bishop on e2, Black can safely make this push without fearing a check on b5. After 9 Ne1 h5 10 f4 exf4 11 Bxf4 Nd7 12 c4 Nc6 13 Nh1 Be7, Black had a clear advantage in O.Ekebjærg-H.Tarnowiecki, correspondence 2002.

c) 6 Bb5+ c6 7 Ba4 (or 7 Be2!? Ne7 8 0-0 Qd7 9 b3 c5 10 Bc4 Nbc6, also with a slight advantage to Black) 7 ... Na6 8 Bb3 is another way to bring the bishop into play, but the excessive manoeuvring of White's minor pieces has cost valuable time.

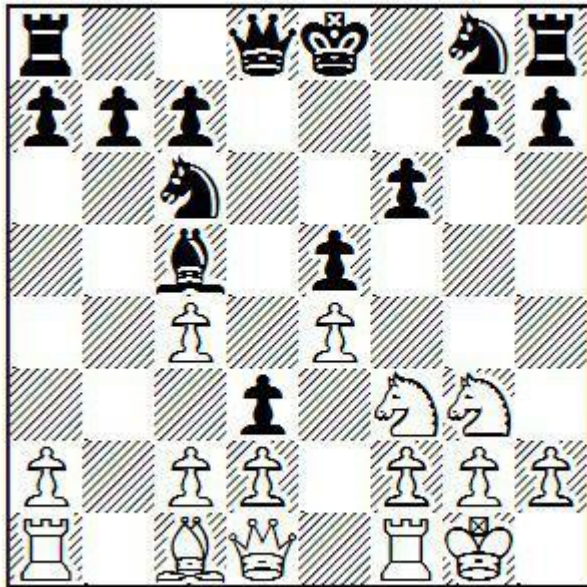


After 8 ... Nc5 9 Bxe6 Nxe6 10 d3 Qd7 11 0-0 0-0-0 12 Nd2 g6, Black was already prepared to launch an offensive on the white king: 13 a4 h5 14 h4 Nh6 15 Nc4 Nf7 16 a5 Be7 17 a6 b6 18 Bd2 Rdg8 19 Qe1 Bd8 20 Kh2 g5! and the attack was successful in V.Kokorin-A.Shpakovsky, correspondence 2012.

6 ... Nc6 7 Bc4 Bxc4 8 bxc4 d3!

A deliciously disruptive move that secures Black the better game. She immediately throws a spanner in the works of any ideas White might have had of safely consolidating. Black prevents d2-d3, opens the a7-g1 diagonal, and vacates the future outpost on d4, all in one go.

9 0-0 Bc5



10 Ne1!

This extremely rare move, which has only been played once before to my knowledge, is White's best chance at reaching equality. The retreat looks passive, but White needs to force the issue on d3 as quickly as possible. Other moves are weaker:

a) 10 cxd3 Qxd3 is very comfortable for Black.

b) 10 Rb1 Nge7! (the b7-pawn is poisoned, as in so many other chess openings; White goes through cartwheels to solve the problem caused by Black's powerful eighth move) 11 cxd3 (or 11 Rb5 b6 12 Rb3 dxc2 13 Qxc2 Qd6 14 Bb2 0-0-0 15 Ne2 Na5 and Black has a large advantage, J.Boersma-R.Bertholee, Dieren 2002) 11 ... Qxd3 12 Qb3 (12 Rxb7? allows the rook to be trapped after 12 ... Bb6 13 c5 Qa6!) 12 ... Qxb3 13 Rxb3 Na5 14 Rc3 0-0-0 is clearly better for Black.

b) 10 Nf5 is active, but White has spent far too many moves on this solitary steed: 10 ... Qd7 11 Rb1 0-0-0 12 Rb5 b6 13 cxd3 Nge7! left Black with a healthy positional advantage in S.J.Henri-B.Westera, correspondence 2007.

10 ... dxc2 11 Qxc2 Qd7!

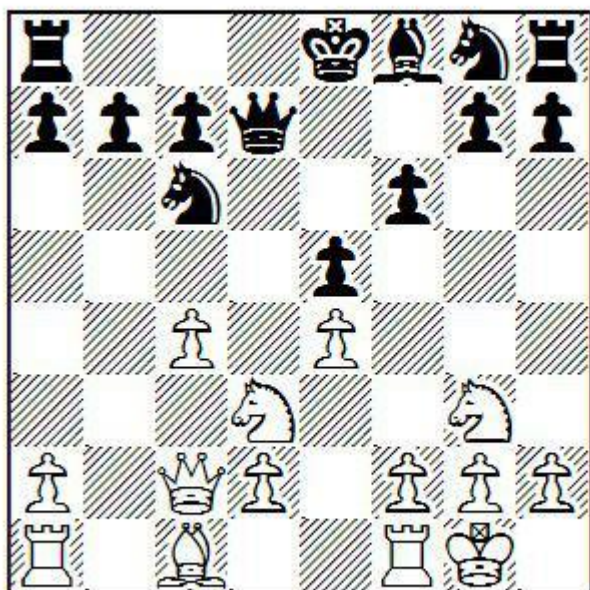
A very accurate novelty. It is important not to block off the bishop's retreat just yet.

Instead, 11 ... Nge7 was played in the only game to reach this position. It appears to give Black complete control over d4, which would be structurally dominating. However, White has good chances to equalize, so long as she follows up energetically: 12 Nd3! Bd4 13 Rb1 b6 14 Ba3 Qd7 15 c5! with a balanced game, Her.Nagel-Mi.Furlan, Latschach 2012.

12 Nd3

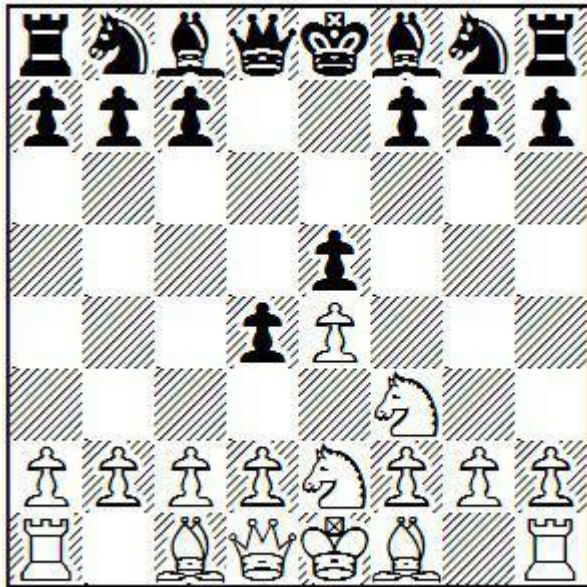
12 Rb1 Nd4! 13 Qc3 Ne6 is a favourable relocation that increases Black's control over c5 while maintaining her vice-like grip on d4.

12 ... Bf8!



Black will regain the lost tempi with a timely rook-lift to d8, with or without the castling operation. In the meantime, Black preserves all of her trumps and retains a strong positional superiority. Play might continue 13 Rb1 0-0-0 14 Ne1 Nd4 15 Qb2 b6 with a stable and lasting advantage for Black.

B: 4 Nf3

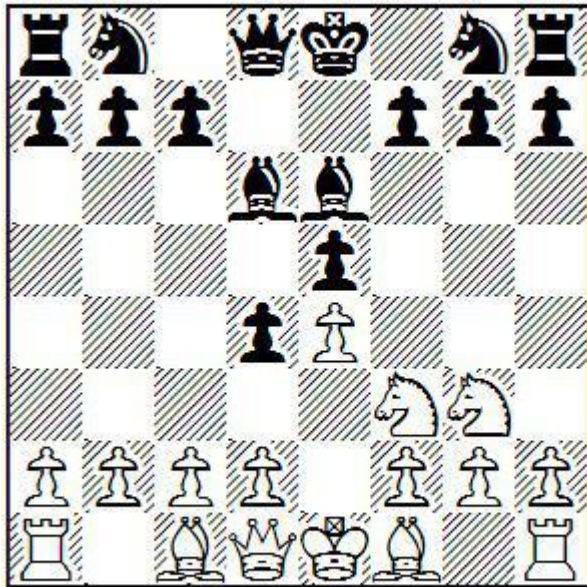


Perhaps the most natural move, and unsurprisingly quite common. However, it is a little careless to think that White can get away with an easy passage to the middlegame after wasting so much time in the opening. Black has a choice between safe, orthodox development (4 ... Bd6) and an immediate assault (4 ... Nc6 5 Ng3 h5!?).

4 ... Bd6

The aggressive alternative is 4 ... Nc6 5 Ng3 (5 d3 Bg4! is a typical theme to remember in the 2 Nc3 variation; after 6 Ng3 Bb4+! 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Qxd2 Bxf3 9 gxf3, Black can emphasize the fresh weakening of White's structure with the accurate 9 ... Qh4!, leading to a clear advantage) 5 ... h5 6 Bb5? (unwisely ignoring Black's last move; 6 h4 a6 7 Bc4 Bg4 8 c3 Qd7 leaves White only slightly worse) 6 ... h4! 7 Ne2 h3! 8 gxh3? (8 g3 Qf6 9 Neg1 was necessary, though it's hardly appealing!) 8 ... Qf6! and White was practically lost in under ten moves, An.Young-Y.Shulman, Bolingbrook 2005.

5 Ng3 Be6!



An important move, preventing Bc4. Note that Black generally prefers to play ... Nc6 without moving the c-pawn in these positions. White can't drum up enough pressure on d4 to necessitate Black playing ... c7-c5, while keeping the pawn back at home adds an extra level of protection if Black castles on the queenside, which is common in this variation.

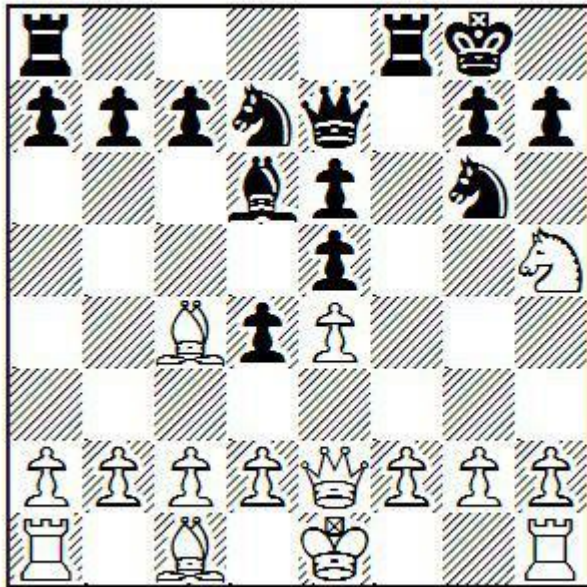
6 Bb5+

6 c3 c5 doesn't get White anywhere, and 6 Nh5 Kf8 shouldn't worry Black either. White has little to show for moving her knight four times in six moves to the edge of the board, with a further retreat to come.

6 ... Nd7 7 Qe2

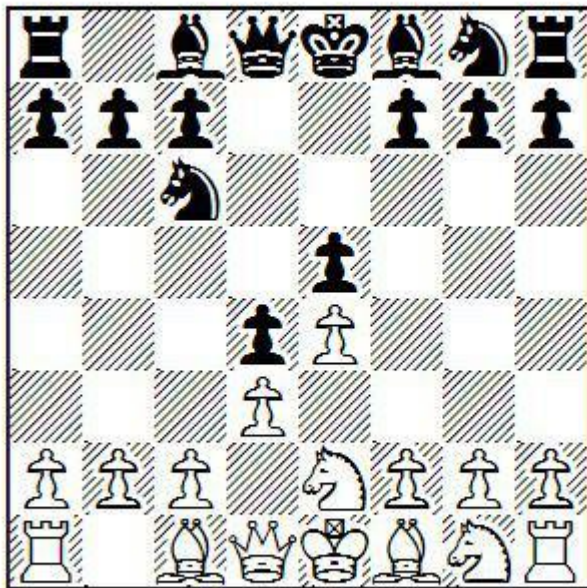
It appears that White has created some discomfort in the opposition camp, but Black can simply continue with natural development as she needn't fear White exchanging a knight for the e6-bishop.

7 ... Ne7! 8 Ng5 Ng6 9 Nxe6 fxe6 10 Nh5 0-0 11 Bc4 Qe7



The position is very pleasant for Black. For example, 12 g3 Nb6 13 Bb3 c5 14 c4?! Nh8! left White in all sorts of trouble in R.Khusnutdinov-E.Sveshnikov, Cheliabinsk 2008.

C: 4 d3 Nc6



5 g3?!

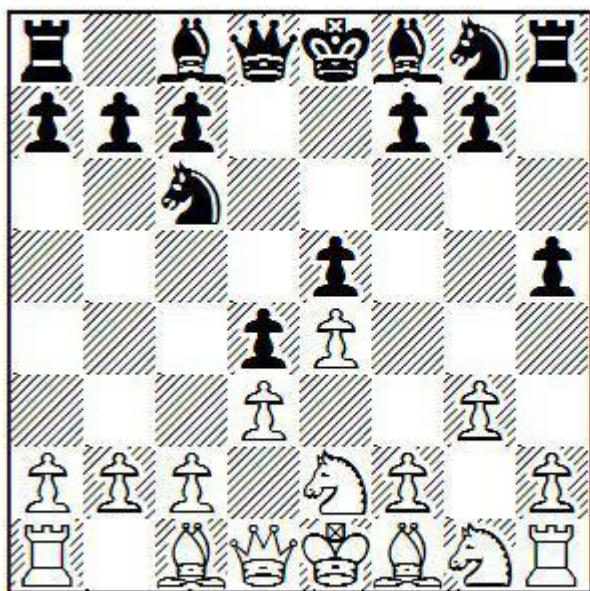
This is a very natural sequence of moves from White, so it's worth remembering how Black can immediately take over the initiative. Instead:

a) 5 f4 Bg4! is very annoying for White, because the natural kick 6 h3?! gets hit by 6 ... Bb4+! 7 Bd2 Bxe2 8 Nxe2 exf4 and suddenly ... Qh4+ is a serious problem. Believe it or not, I once faced 6 Nf3??, when 6 ... Bxf3 7 gxf3 Qh4+! led to a miniature in *Istanbul* (2278)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014.

b) 5 Nf3 is probably best, although this is again met by 5 ... Bg4!, as we saw via 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 d3 in the notes to line B.

5 ... h5!?

Black has several ways to maintain a slight advantage (for instance, 5 ... f5 is very good too, since 6 exf5? falls foul of the intermezzo 6 ... Qd5!), but this move, which launches a surprise attack before White can even think about completing her development, is my favourite. Black has scored extremely well from this position.



6 f4

White has a large choice here, but Black retains superiority regardless. For example:

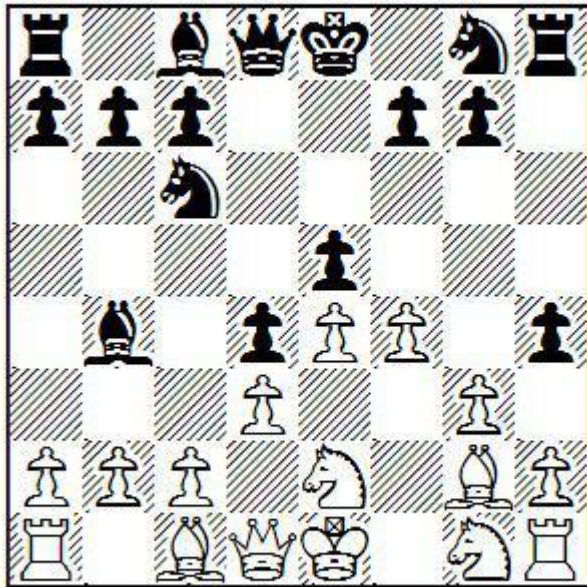
a) 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 Bg2 Qd7 8 0-0 0-0-0 gives Black fantastic attacking prospects on the kingside.

b) 6 Bg2 h4 7 Nh3 Be7 with a clear advantage to Black, D.Suttles-Se.Furman, Polanica Zdroj 1967.

c) 6 h4 halts the black h-pawn's advance, but the additional weakening of the kingside means that White must give up on the natural f2-f4 break. After 6 ... Nf6 7 Bg5 Bb4+ 8 Bd2 Ng4 9 Bh3 Qf6!, Black has a large positional advantage, C.Haussernot-M.Cornette, French Team Championship 2009.

d) 6 h3 is probably White's best response, even if most players would be very wary to allow ... h5-h4. Indeed, Black can claim a small but stable positional advantage with the immediate 6 ... h4 7 g4 Nge7. However, the more aggressively-minded might prefer 6 ... Be6 7 f4 f6 with violent intentions on the kingside after a subsequent ... Qd7 and ... 0-0-0. The addition of ... h7-h5 and h2-h3 favours Black as it prevents White from locking things up. Notice, for example, that the attempt to do so with 8 f5?! Bf7 9 Bg2 Qd7 10 g4 0-0-0 11 g5 runs into 11 ... g6! and Black is certainly better prepared for the ensuing opening of the position, while 11 Bd2 hxg4 12 hxg4 Rxh1 13 Bxh1 g5! is positionally fantastic for Black, who can turn her attention to the queenside, where her space advantage will very likely prove decisive.

6 ... h4 7 Bg2 Bb4+



An awkward check to face. Black exerts pressure on both sides of the board and secures a slight advantage, while 8 Bd2 Nf6 9 fxe5?? Ng4! led to a quick win in Jos.A.Santos-R.Damaso, Portuguese Team Championship 1997.

Theory: Blackmar-Diemer Gambit

1 e4 d5 2 d4?!

An immediate counter-sacrifice! This sideline is only encountered roughly one game in every hundred that starts with 1 e4 d5, but note that it can also arise via the more common move-order 1 d4 d5 2 e4?!

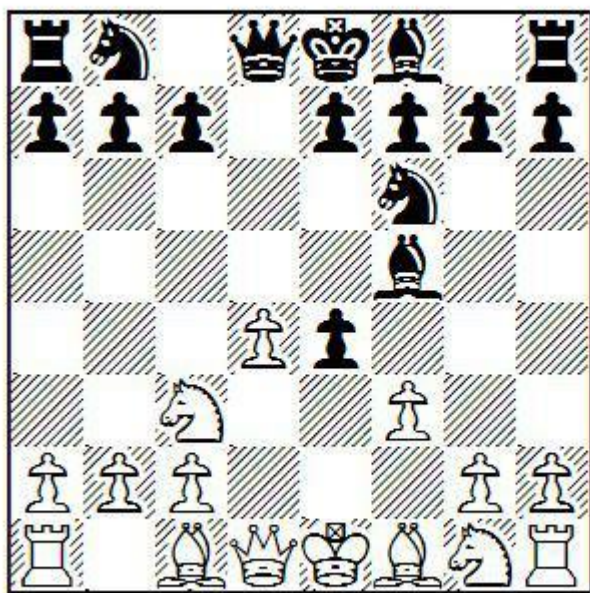
2 ... dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3

The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, or 'BDG' as it is more commonly known to its (often fanatic) exponents. Devotees of this gambit are often zealous to the extent that nothing can persuade them of its unsoundness, and who are we to judge such dogmatism about a dubious defence? In fact, despite most opening texts dismissing 2 d4 with barely a mention, the gambit can be tricky to face over the board, particularly against a bloodthirsty opponent who knows the theory back to front. What's more, it occurs in club chess, and especially blitz, far more often than you might expect. Consequently, I have decided to spend a bit of time shoring up Black's repertoire, and I recommend you do the same. But make no mistake: this gambit is completely unsound, and with good preparation Black can

be hopeful of coming out of the opening with at least a slight advantage and likely much more than that.

4 ... Bf5

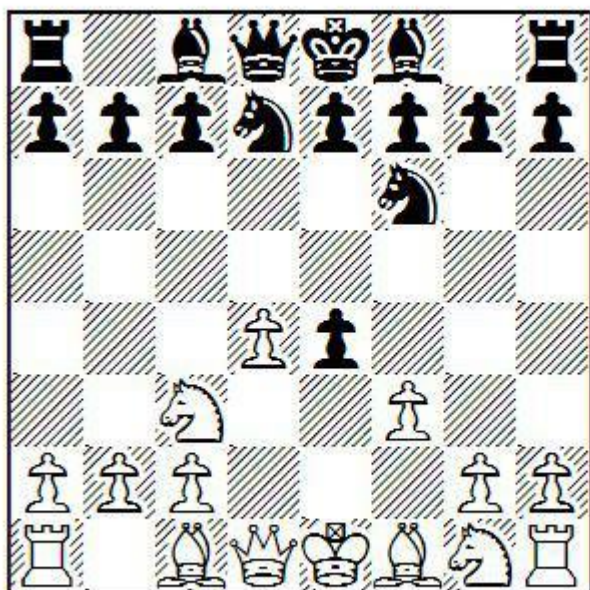
There are several ways of playing against the BDG that are more than satisfactory for Black, but in my opinion the so-called 'Vienna' variation, which begins from the diagram, is the most dynamic counter-punch. Instead of cashing in on the extra pawn with 4 ... exf3 and then going into staunch defensive mode, Black continues to prioritize development. Indeed, in many of the variations that follow, Black often prefers to give back the pawn in exchange for rapid development and piece activity. A common theme is the long-term instability of White's king, who often fails to find a safe haven on either side of the board. Furthermore, Black may well play ... e4xf3 at a more promising moment if White ignores the tension in the centre. Having said all that, Black needs to remain careful in order to ensure that White doesn't whip up the sort of coffeehouse attack that features so often in BDG miniatures.



The recommended response for White in most BDG texts is to capture on e4, which is also the most common reply. However, I believe Black should be very happy to see this on the board as, with a well-timed return of the material, she can quickly get a promising

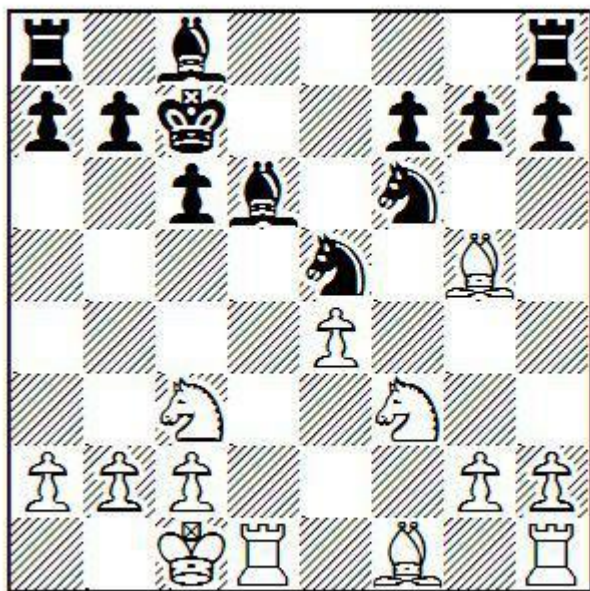
position. More testing is 5 g4!?, which leads to unusual and complex variations that should perfectly suit most readers – particularly because Black comes out on top even against White's best play. Finally, White has a couple of less common bishop moves that shouldn't pose too many problems.

Although Black can be guaranteed of an opening advantage after the text, I perfectly understand that some readers would prefer not to have to learn a reasonable body of theory just to refute an opening that occurs so seldom. For the lazy among us, then, an easy shortcut to equality that you can learn in less than ten minutes is 4 ... Nbd7!?.



If you're not in the mood to face a gambit, like playing endings, or just want to unsettle your BDG foe, 4 ... Nbd7!? is a very interesting, but rarely played, sideline that will almost certainly take your opponent by surprise. Against a bloodthirsty gambiteer, it can be a very powerful and annoying retort, as White is virtually forced to enter a level endgame: 5 fxe4 e5! (clearly the point of Black's passive fourth move; we have actually transposed to a relatively harmless line of the Czech Pirc that usually begins 1 e4 d6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nbd7 4 f4 e5, and now the toothless continuation 5 fxe5?! dxe5 leads to the text; in this line 5 Nf3 is much better) 6 dxe5 (after

6 Nf3 exd4 7 Nxd4 Bc5 8 Be3 0-0 9 Be2 Re8 10 Bf3?! Ne5! 11 Be2 Neg4!, White quickly capitulated in M.Meadows-D.Smerdon, team rapid, Daventry 2013) 6 ... Nxe5 7 Qxd8+ Kxd8 8 Bg5 c6! (immediately giving the king a safe haven at c7) 9 Nf3 Bd6 10 0-0-0 Kc7



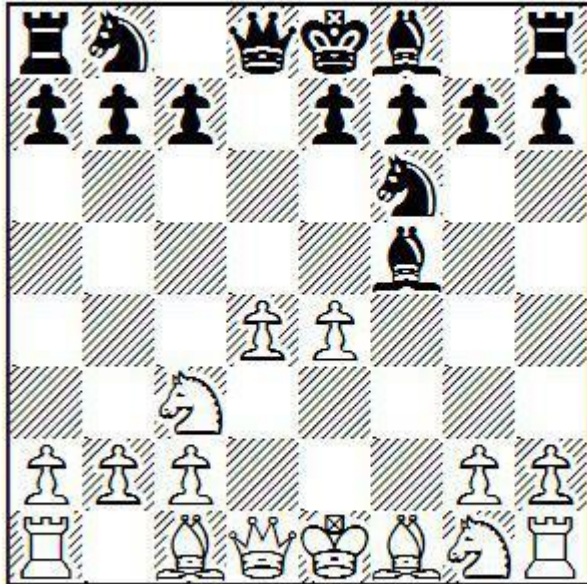
Black has begun to unravel and could start to build up serious positional pressure on e4 if White doesn't act quickly. Essentially, if Black is careful over the next couple of moves and can diffuse White's arsenal of tactical tricks, the endgame future looks promising. In particular, Black should watch out for Rxd6 ideas, especially connected with long-term positional compensation.

There is only one line that Black needs to know by heart: 11 Be2 (this has a hidden drop of venom as 11 ... Be6?? loses immediately to 12 Rxd6! Kxd6 13 Rd1+ etc) 11 ... Nxf3 12 gxf3 Nh5! 13 Rxd6!? (the only threatening continuation; it looks dangerous initially, but a few accurate moves ensure Black's advantage) 13 ... Kxd6 14 Rd1+ Kc7! 15 Be7 b6 and Black was slightly better, although I managed to hold grimly on for a draw in D.Smerdon-L.Aronian, Tromsø Olympiad 2014. One of only two games in this book in which you'll see me playing with the white pieces!

Returning to 4 ... Bf5, we will cover:

A: 5 fxe4
B: 5 g4
C: 5 Bg5
D: 5 Bc4!?

A: 5 fxe4



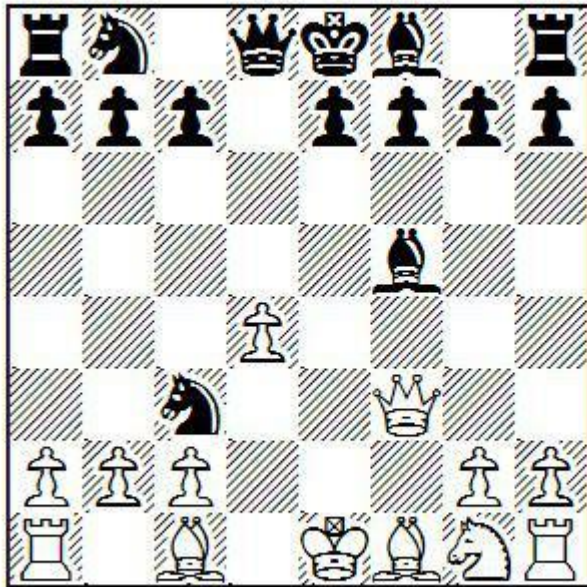
By far and away White's most popular and most recommended move. But in my opinion Black gets a very easy game.

5 ... Nxe4 6 Qf3

The point behind White's play. After the usual (and greedy) 6 ... Nd6, she plans Bf4, 0-0-0, and a rapid deployment of her forces in the centre. However, Black has another option.

Instead, 6 Nf3 is possible, but after 6 ... e6 7 Bd3 Bb4!, White is forced to add another pawn to the fire to keep her initiative alive. One possible continuation is 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Qe1 Bxd3 11 cxd3 Nd5 12 Ng5 Nf6 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 Qxe6+ Qe7 (not 14 ... Kf8?? 15 Rxf6+! and mates) 15 Qc8+ Qd8 with a draw.

6 ... Nxc3

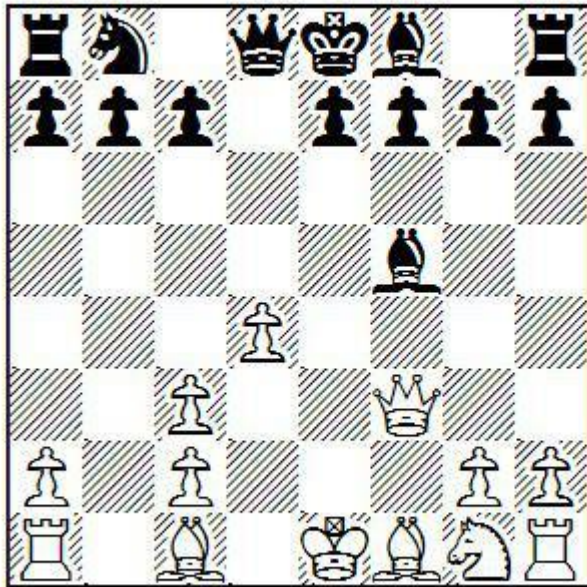


Forward, only forward! White has two lines at her disposal at this juncture, but neither promise an advantage. Let's consider:

A1: 7 bxc3

A2: 7 Qxf5

A1: 7 bxc3

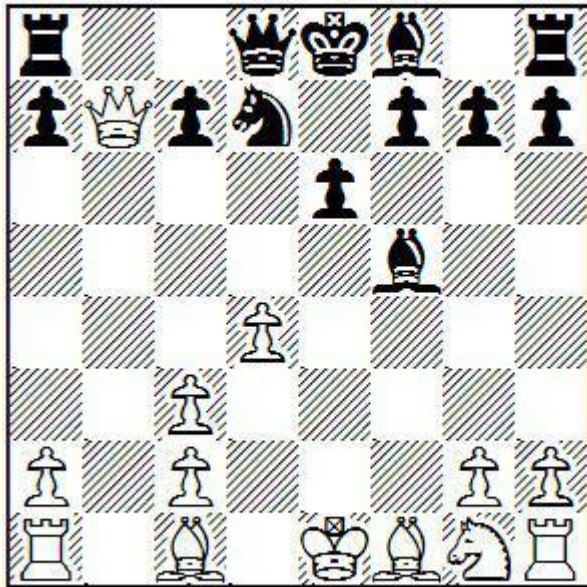


White threatens f5 and b7, while Black is still a fair way away from full development. It appears that Black will have to shuffle something to c8 in order to meet both threats, but in fact this is the optimal moment to change the course of the game and give back the pawn.

7 ... e6! 8 Qxb7

Consistent, but suddenly it is White feeling some guilt about slow development. That's what we like to see!

8 ... Nd7



9 Bb5!?

The most aggressive continuation, though not the best. Still, if White continues with more routine development, Black secures the better game:

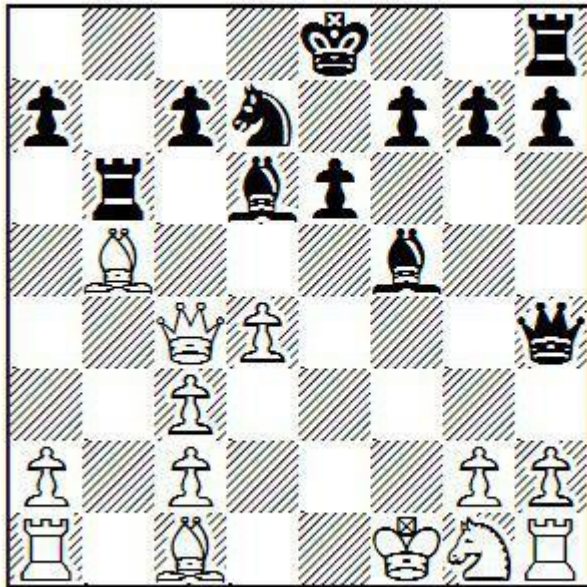
a) 9 Nf3 Rb8 10 Qxa7 Bxc2 gives Black a sizeable positional advantage. Her pawn structure is superior, her development is easier, and White still has to solve the problem of her wayward queen.

b) 9 Bd3 Rb8! is also good for Black, thanks to the very cute tactic 10 Qxa7? Be4!!, threatening ... Ra8. After 11 Bxe4 Qh4+ 12 Kf1 Qxe4, White's position has collapsed.

9 ... Rb8! 10 Qc6

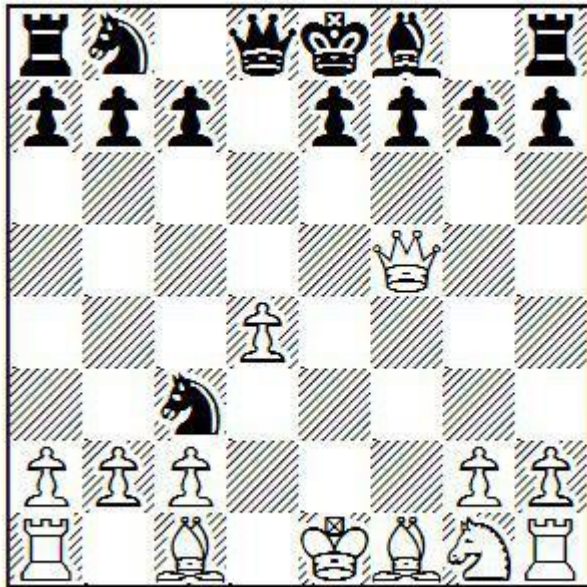
The best try. 10 Qa6 Bxc2 leaves Black well on top, while 10 Bxd7+? Kxd7 11 Qxa7 Qh4+ 12 Kf1 Bd6 is completely crushing.

10 ... Rb6 11 Qc4 Qh4+ 12 Kf1 Bd6



Black has a clear advantage. Without even a pawn to compensate for the disharmony in her position, White's only hope to avoid ruination is to try to prevent Black from castling herself. However, after 13 Nf3 Qe7! 14 Qa4 Be4 with ... c7-c6 to follow, Black succeeds in completing her development after which her superiority is clear.

A2: 7 Qxf5



White ignores the chance to win her pawn back and instead presses forward for the initiative. This is a better try, though with correct play Black should still be able to secure the advantage.

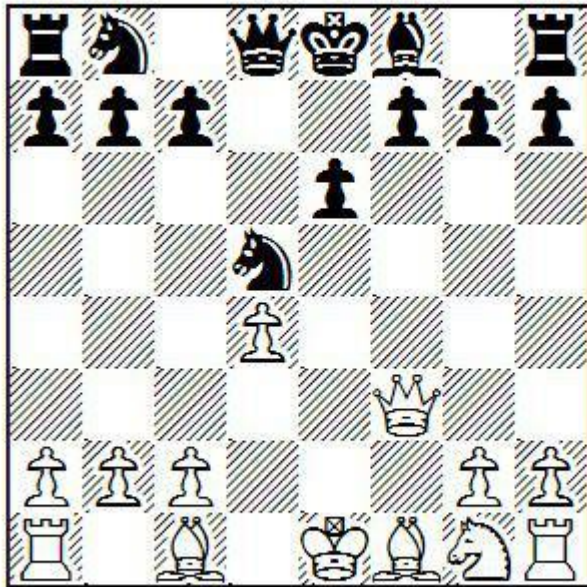
7 ... e6!

An important intermezzo.

8 Qf3

If the queen retreats the other way, Black can employ a handy tactic to trade the queens: 8 Qd3 Qh4+ (simplest; even if 8 ... Nd5! is objectively stronger) 9 g3 Qe4+ 10 Qxe4 Nxe4 11 Bg2 Nd6, Black is a clear pawn ahead in the endgame, though the bishop pair may pose some technical difficulties in converting the full point.

8 ... Nd5



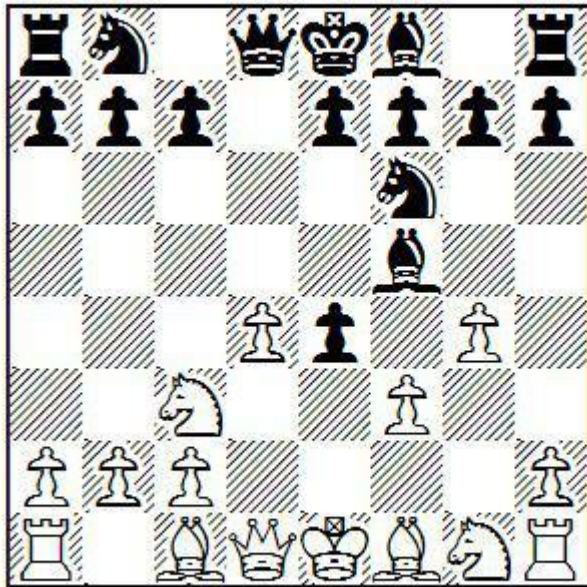
Black threatens ... Qh4+, forcing the trade of queens on f2. For example:

a) 9 c4?? Nb4! wins another pawn thanks to the standard tactic 10 Qe4 Qxd4! 11 Qxd4 Nc2+ etc.

b) 9 Qf2? seeks to pre-empt the check on h4, but falls foul of a different one: 9 ... Bb4+! 10 Bd2 (10 c3?? Nxc3 is resignable) 10 ... Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 Qh4+ and the queen does the damage on h4 after all.

c) 9 c3 c5 (immediately pressuring the centre) 10 Bb5+ Nc6 11 Ne2 Be7 and Black has a clear advantage. It's easy to forget that she is still a whole pawn up!

B: 5 g4



White figures that she is already committed, so she may as well go all out. In fact, I believe this is White's most dangerous option after 4 ... Bf5, though the highly unorthodox, highly committal thrust of the g-pawn is risky business. The ensuing positions are complex and double-edged, which should suit most players on the black side to a tee.

5 ... Bg6

Now White can continue the kingside charge in two ways:

B1: 6 h4

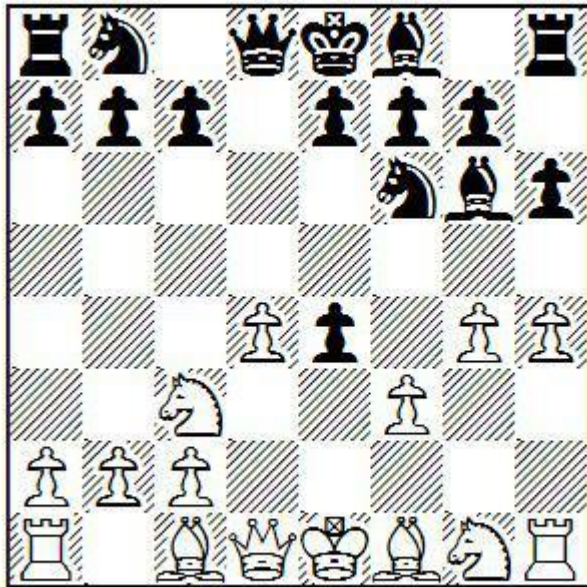
B2: 6 g5

Note that 6 f4? e6 7 Bg2 Bb4! is a complete opening disaster; for example, 8 h4 h5 9 g5 Ng4 with a decisive advantage.

B1: 6 h4

Consistent, though of course White's kingside offensive is completely unjustified, at least from a principled perspective. Then again, who am I to talk about opening principles?

6 ... h6



Now White has a large choice, but no path will lead to a happy ending. You do *not* have to memorize what follows, though it is important to remember that Black doesn't have to keep her extra pawn in order to secure the advantage. White's overextension and chronic structural weaknesses mean that, so long as the initiative is blunted, Black should always emerge with the healthier game. In particular, ... Nc6 and ... e7-e5 ideas should always be kept in mind, if allowed, while aiming to develop with ... e7-e6 and the pin ... Bb4 is another common theme. The black queen will not be left out of the fun either, often developing to d6 where she can threaten a little excursion to g3, while facilitating the exodus of the black monarch to the queenside.

7 Nh3

Other moves also leave Black on top:

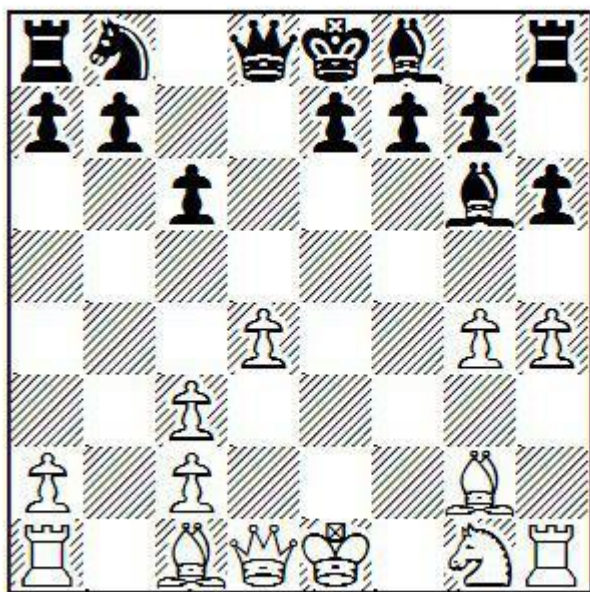
a) 7 Bg2 Nc6! 8 d5 (or 8 Be3 e5! with a favourable opening of the centre; for instance, 9 dxe5 Qxd1+ 10 Rxd1 exf3! 11 exf6 fxg2 12 Rh2 Nb4! and Black is clearly better) 8 ... exf3! 9 Nxf3 Nb4 and White's position falls apart. Black doesn't even need to go hunting the loose pawns, as she has the time to finish her development first: 10 0-0 e6! and with Black's bishop swinging to c5, White should probably consider resigning.

b) 7 Nge2 c5 (the standard remedy 7 ... Nc6 is good too) 8 Nf4 cxd4 9 Nxg6 fxg6 10 Nxe4 Nxe4 11 fxe4 e5! and the weakness of Black's light squares is amply compensated for by White's weakened dark squares, a space advantage and an extra pawn.

c) 7 Be3 Nc6 allows 8 d5! which is a bit annoying, with White closer to castling queenside. If Black tries 8 ... Nb4 to pressure the d-pawn, White can quickly shove a rook on the d-file to bolster the centre; for example, 9 Qe2! Nfxd5 10 0-0-0 with decent compensation. Instead, Black should prefer 7 ... e6! (holding back d4-d5 and threatening ... Bb4 simultaneously) 8 Bg2 Bb4 9 Ne2 Nc6 with a clear advantage.

d) 7 h5 Bh7 8 g5 tries to maintain the brute-force approach, but 8 ... hxg5 9 Bxg5 Qd6! highlights the weaknesses left behind in the wake of the foolhardy pawn storm. White should probably take time out to stop the black queen penetrating to g3, when Black can casually play ... Nc6, finish her development and then go about extending the advantage.

e) 7 fxe4 Nxe4 8 Bg2 is probably White's best option. After 8 ... Nxc3 9 bxc3 c6,



White has secured some activity and kept her centre propped up, but her compensation is still not quite worth a pawn. Black has the

better chances, and should immediately be looking to prepare ... e7-e5 to challenge the centre and complete her development.

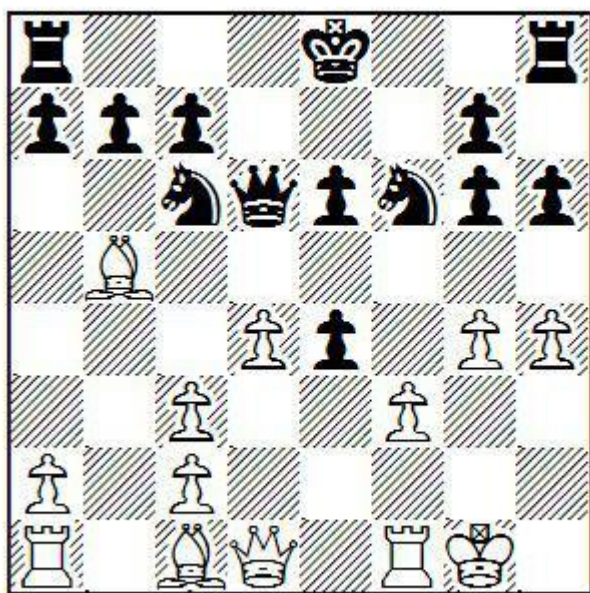
7 ... Nc6! 8 Bb5

After 8 d5 Ne5 9 fxe4 Nxe4 10 Bg2 Nxc3 11 bxc3 e6!, Black again has a large advantage.

8 ... e6 9 Nf4 Bb4!

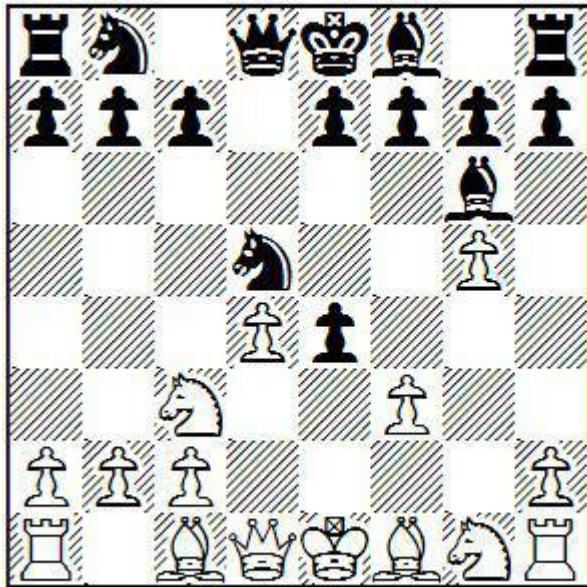
The pin on the c3-knight helps Black to stabilize her centre, while the exchange on g6 will give her useful activity along the f-file.

10 Nxg6 fxc6 11 0-0 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Qd6!



White's position is littered with weaknesses, so Black could claim an advantage even without the extra material. As it stands, she is clearly better.

B2: 6 g5 Nd5



7 Nxe4

7 fxe4 is a gambit that can safely be accepted: 7 ... Nxc3 8 bxc3 Bxe4 9 Nf3 e6 and Black's powerful bishop and lack of weaknesses leave White impotent. Note that the white king will struggle to find a safe haven on either side of the board. The game could continue 10 Bd3 (or 10 Bc4 Nc6 11 0-0 Be7 12 Rb1 0-0!, when b7 is indirectly protected, thanks to a potential ... Na5) 10 ... Bxd3 11 cxd3 Bd6 12 Qe2 0-0 13 0-0 Nd7 and White has nothing to show for the pawn.

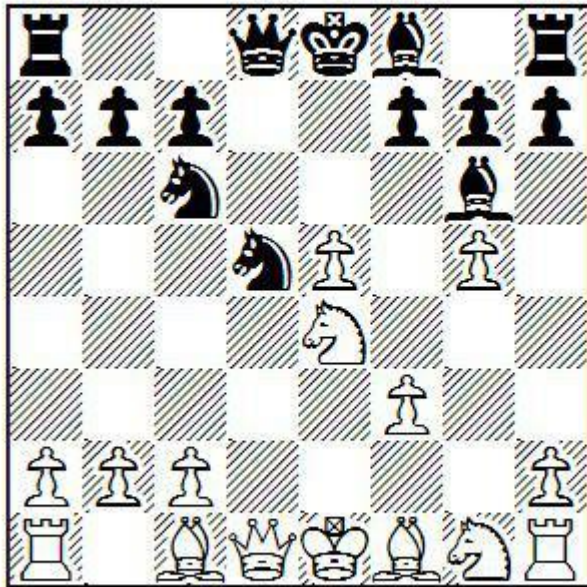
7 ... e5!

Continuing the trend of healthy development with tempo. Black has other attractive options, but I prefer this move, which ensures that White has no reprieve from the pressure.

8 dxe5

8 Ne2 Nc6 favours Black; e.g. 9 c4? Ndb4! with a crushing position.

8 ... Nc6

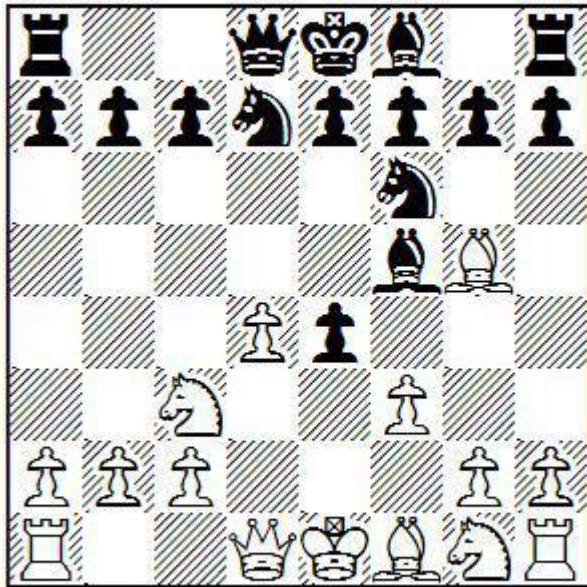


Black is clearly better. For example:

a) 9 Bb5 Qd7 10 c4 Ndb4 11 Qxd7+ Kxd7 leaves Black with a healthy endgame advantage.

b) 9 Bc4 is the only critical try, as in K.Shirazi-S.Krivoshey, Metz 2001, but Black has a neat tactical motif that we saw earlier in Game 27 (Felber-Wang): 9 ... Bb4+ 10 c3 Bxe4! 11 fxe4 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bxc3+ 13 Bd2 Qd4! 14 Bxf7+ Ke7! and Black emerges with a clear advantage.

C: 5 Bg5 Nbd7!



Black continues a healthy strategy of productive development, indirectly defending e4.

6 Bc4

Alternatively:

a) 6 Qe2 forces Black to give up the central occupation: 6 ... exf3 7 Nxf3 e6 8 0-0-0 Be7, when White has finally achieved a BDG-type position, but the inconvenient position of her queen, retarding the development of the f1-bishop, means that her piece activity is not particularly dangerous. White has some compensation, but not a pawn's worth.

b) 6 fxe4 invites complications, but Black can keep everything under control by calmly continuing 6 ... Nxe4 7 Qf3 Nxc5 8 Qxf5 e6 9 Qd3 h6!, making way for the knight's retreat and keeping a healthy extra pawn.

6 ... h6!

An important move. Black pops the question to the white bishop at just the right moment, when Bh4 is undesirable.

7 Bxf6

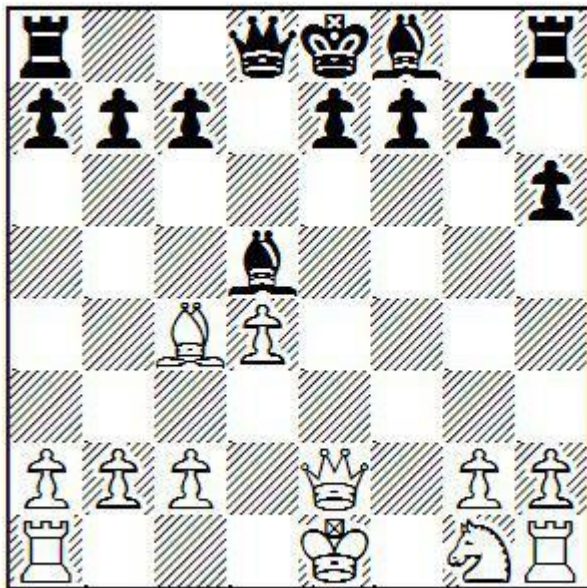
A sad but necessary concession. After 7 Bh4? Nb6! 8 Bb3 (8 Bb5+? c6 9 Bxf6 exf6 10 fxe4 wins the pawn back, but gives up the position: 10 ... Bg6 11 Be2 Bb4! and White's game is in disarray) 8 ...

e3! (a powerful discoordinating blow) 9 Nge2 e6, Black has a clear advantage and will follow up with a quick ... c7-c5 to increase the pressure on White's position. For example, 10 0-0 c5! leaves Black well on top, while the attempted pawn grab 10 Qc1? falls short to 10 ... c5! 11 Qxe3 c4 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Ba4+ Nxa4 14 Nxa4 Bxc2 with a crushing position.

7 ... Nxf6 8 fxe4 Nxe4 9 Nxe4

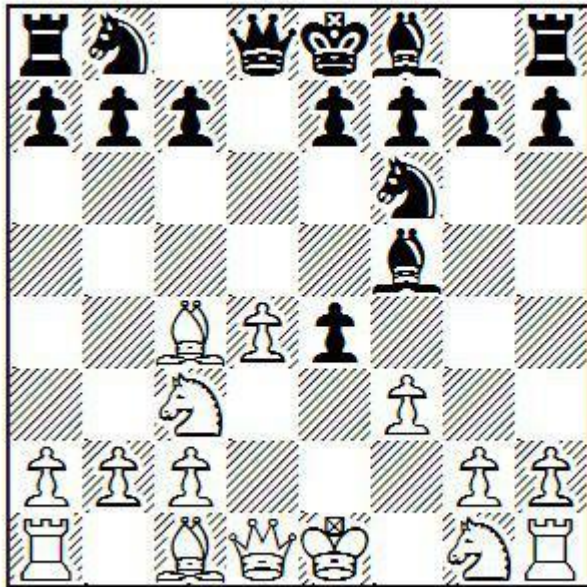
Both 9 Bd3 Nxc3 10 bxc3 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 c6 and 9 Qf3 Nd6 10 Bd3 Qd7 leave Black with a clear advantage.

9 ... Bxe4 10 Qe2 Bd5



Black is still a few moves away from full development, but her position is without weaknesses. White's compensation is insufficient to justify the pawn minus.

D: 5 Bc4!?



White continues to play in gambit fashion, inviting a transposition to one of the main lines after 5 ... exf3. Again, Black can do better.

5 ... e6!

The right response, forcing White's hand as 6 ... Bb4 is now threatened.

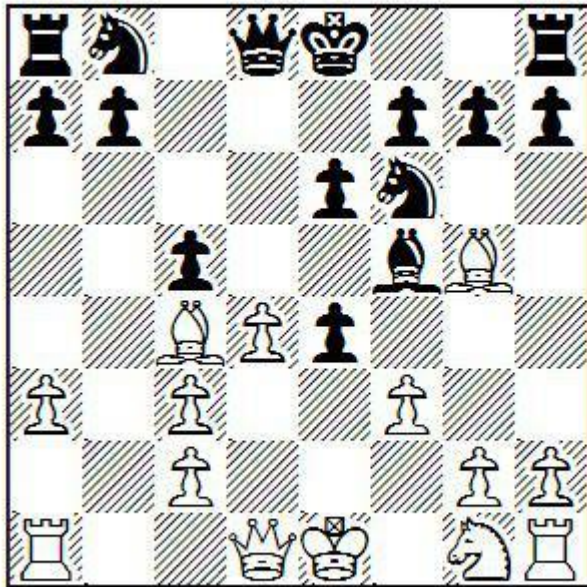
6 fxe4

Instead:

a) 6 Be3? Bb4! gives Black an overwhelming position.

b) 6 g4 doesn't work as well as on the previous move, since the addition of Bc4 and ... e7-e6 is certainly in Black's favour; for example, 6 ... Bg6 7 g5 Nd5 8 Nxe4 Nc6! with the healthy plan of ... Qd7, ... 0-0-0 and ... e6-e5.

c) 6 Bg5 allows Black to enter a superior version of the mainline BDG after 6 ... exf3, but I prefer to continue in more spirited fashion: 6 ... Bb4! 7 a3 (if 7 Ne2, Black would take on f3, leaving White struggling to show any compensation for the pawn) 7 ... Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 c5!

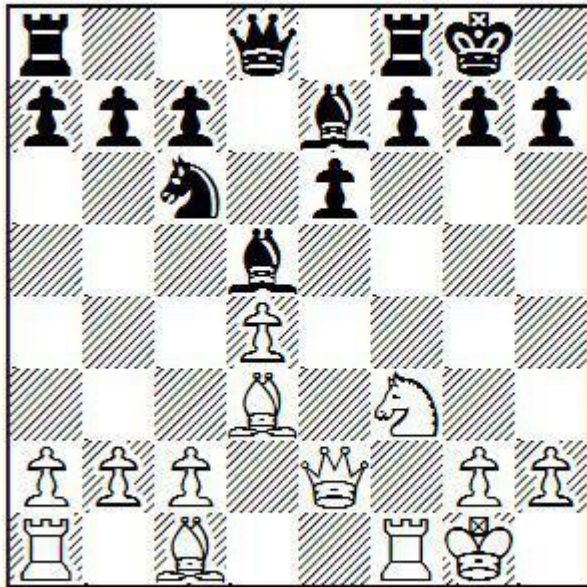


Black immediately challenges the centre, while freeing the d8-a5 diagonal for her queen. In fact, the fresh possibility of ... Qa5, eyeing both the pawn on c3 and potential threats on the g5-bishop, guarantees Black a large advantage. For example, 9 dxc5? Qa5! wins, or 9 fxe4 Bxe4 10 Nf3 Qa5! and Black is clearly better.

6 ... Nxe4 7 Nxe4 Bxe4 8 Nf3 Be7 9 Qe2

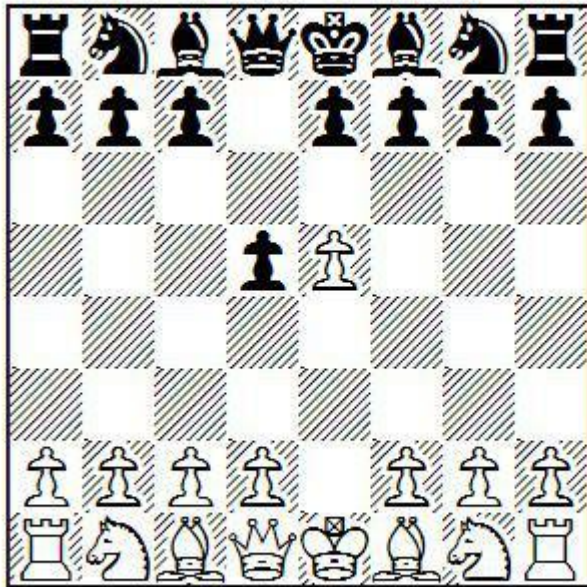
Not 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qe2?, as Black refutes the move-order with 10 ... Bxf3! 11 Rxf3 Qxd4+.

9 ... Bd5 10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 Nc6



Black threatens ... Bxf3, and will play ... f7-f5 after either 12 Be3 or 12 c3, snuffing out any thoughts White had of a kingside attack. Black should then be able to consolidate the extra material with a technically winning position.

Theory: 2 e5?!
1 e4 d5 2 e5?!



Strangely enough, this move is more common than 2 d4. I suspect its popularity comes from players from the white side who are surprised by 1 ... d5 and seek to get out of the well-trodden paths as quickly as possible. As is so often the case, such deviations come at a cost. White invites a transposition to the Advance Variations of the French (2 ... e6) or Caro-Kann (2 ... c6) defences. However, Black can strive for improved versions of both openings. Even nicer is the fact that she doesn't need to know any particular theoretical variations or be aware of specific tricks in order to obtain a healthy position.

2 ... c5

My favourite reply, but there are equally promising alternatives:

a) 2 ... Bf5 aims for a superior version of the Caro-Kann, where Black will achieve ... c7-c5 in one move instead of two and has already equalized.

b) 2 ... d4!? is also a very good response. Black immediately quells any ambitions White might have had of transposing into a more orthodox opening. Without the possibility of a routine centre by playing d2-d4 herself, White must try to prop up the e5-pawn by other means. In the ensuing positions with this unusual pawn structure, Black usually secures a space advantage and easy

development. One example of this went 3 Nf3 c5 4 Bc4 e6 5 0-0 Ne7 6 d3 Ng6! (preventing Bf4) 7 Re1 Nc6 8 Qe2 b6 9 Bb5 Bb7 and Black had built up an excellent position in Ch.Krüger-C.Müller, German League 1992. Note that White's e5-pawn is a lot less secure than the d4 bastion – this is the key advantage for Black of the asymmetrical formations. Unfortunately, after 10 Ng5!?, Black took the bait and fell for 10 ... Be7?? 11 Nxf7! Kxf7 12 Qf3+ and White won a pawn; instead, 10 ... Qc7 would have left Black with a clear advantage.

3 c3

3 f4 Nc6 4 Nf3 Bg4! demonstrates the key advantage of having a French-like structure with the e-pawn back home. Then 5 c3 (after 5 Bb5 e6 6 0-0 Ne7 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Nf5, Black has a dream French Defence) 5 ... e6 6 Bb5 Ne7 7 0-0 a6 8 Ba4 was already good for Black in Pa.Dimitrov-G.A.Szabo, Sunny Beach 2009, and here 8 ... b5 9 Bc2 d4! was the most accurate way to press home the advantage.

3 ... Nc6

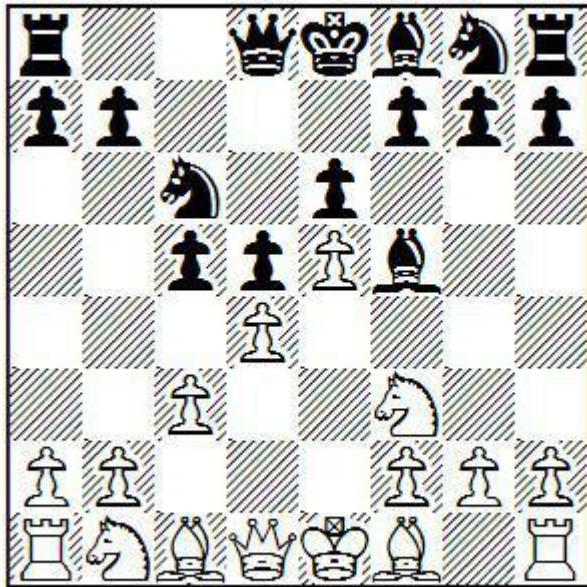
3 ... c4!? is a more unusual approach. After 4 d4 cxd3 5 Bxd3 Nc6 6 f4 Nh6 7 Nd2 Bf5, Black had equalized with seeming ease and went on score to a comfortable victory in A.Shirshova-E.Alekseev, Uljanovsk 2009 (that's not GM Alekseev, by the way).

4 d4

Again inviting a transposition to a French should Black continue 4 ... e6. It's perhaps worth noting that the Advance French is considered perfectly acceptable for Black from a theoretical perspective, but she should certainly prefer taking advantage of our Scandinavian move-order.

Instead, 4 f4 d4 gives Black a structural advantage not dissimilar to the lines analysed after 2 ... d4, and 5 d3 f6 6 exf6?! exf6 7 Nf3 Bd6 8 Be2 Nh6 9 h3 0-0 was clearly better for Black in *upsss* (2000)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2013.

4 ... Bf5! 5 Nf3 e6



After teasing each other with transpositional dance moves, the waltz has led us again to a nice French, or a souped-up Caro-Kann, depending on your imagination. One thing is clear: Black is doing very well. For example, 6 Bb5 Qb6 7 Bxc6+ bxc6 was already a bit better for Black in M.Vandervorst-Vl.Georgiev, La Fere 2012 (in which this position arose via a c2-c3 Sicilian).

Section Five – Conclusion

White should be wary of trying to dodge a theoretical debate with these sidelines. Black's first move, 1 ... d5, is in a sense her most ambitious answer to 1 ... e4, as it immediately seeks to gain superiority in space and in the centre. Should White not take up the challenge with one of the replies from the previous sections, then Black's ambition is rewarded with at least equality from the opening, and in many cases a rapid advantage.

Of White's options in this section, only 2 exd5 Nf6 3 Nc3 can be considered fully sound. You will face this reasonably often in practice, though White can lay no claim to an advantage – the resulting positions are equal, while retaining sufficient imbalance that all results are possible. Against White's other choices at move two, the news is even better: you should now feel confident to press for the full point straight from the word go!

Postscript

Wow, that was a long book. And you made it all the way to the end – well done! It has been a joy to write, but it turned out to be a much bigger book than I expected. There are three reasons for this.

Firstly, as I wrote each chapter, I discovered many new ideas, for both sides, that have never before been played or published. This is evident from the high number of novelties scattered throughout the chapters, and which any reader of a new opening book should be happy to see. I wish you many quick and effortless points on account of these discoveries!

Secondly, I wanted to make sure that all lines were covered, even those that I don't personally believe are very important. This meant going deep into branches that objectively aren't threatening, but may well crop up more often than they ought to in practice. In particular, I have placed extra focus on variations that occur with high frequency, such as the Wuss and the surprisingly common 3 Nc3 in Section Five.

And finally, seeing as this is the first comprehensive repertoire project to focus on 3 ... Bg4, I wanted the book to stand the test of time. There will undoubtedly be corrections and improvements on this work in the future as chess computers grow stronger, and so I have been as thorough as I possibly can, double- and triple-checking the analysis with multiple engines. Despite my best efforts, some lines in this book will inevitably be cast as dubious by authors and theoreticians at some point or another, which is why I have offered alternative lines for Black in most chapters.

It may yet come to pass that our favourite weapon is eventually banished to the backwaters of refuted openings; but even if such a tragedy does occur, I sincerely hope that this book provides you with a hefty double-dose of pleasurable reading and sparkling victories for many years to come.

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